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ABSTRACT

Noting the need to include the views of youth in national debates about issues facing American youth today, a study focused on youth's views about violence. Information was gleaned from literature reviews, expert panels, and focus groups, to design a survey examining relationships in the schools, homes, and communities, and aspects of youth's lives associated with violence. The survey also asked youth to identify one change they would make to stop the violence they experience. Participating in the study were a sample of 1,012 fifth- through 12-graders in Colorado; a parallel study was conducted with a nationally representative group of 1,001 youths. This report presents findings from the Colorado sample with comparisons to the national sample. The major findings of the study follow: (1) to end violence, we must start with accepting one another and ending emotional violence; (2) emotional violence is part of many youth's lives; (3) physical and extreme violence are widespread; (4) there is a strong connection between emotional and physical violence; (5) cultural values celebrating one way to be "in" need to end; (6) a sizable proportion of youth call on adults to change the environment to help them feel safe; (7) children need strong relationships with their parents; (8) improving teacher-student relationships will help reduce violence; (9) improve relationships with friends; (10) improve the larger culture, addressing stress, family economic health, drugs, violence, and community improvement; (11) coping skills are important; and (12) youth need good relationships in all aspects of their lives. The report delineates implications of these findings for parents, teachers, school, communities, and for government. The report's six appendices include selected data tables, data collection instruments, selected research and policy reports, selected resources, and programs addressing violence, diversity, and civic engagement. (Contains 18 references and 44 tables.) (KB)

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ASK THE CHILDREN:

YOUTH & VIOLENCE

COLORADO STUDENTS SPEAK OUT FOR A MORE CIVIL SOCIETY

the ASK THE CHILDREN™ SERIES

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By Ellen Galinsky
and Kimberlee Salmond

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ASK THE CHILDREN:

YOUTH & VIOLENCE

COLORADO STUDENTS SPEAK OUT FOR A MORE CIVIL SOCIETY

A partnership between
The Colorado Trust and Families and Work Institute

Written by Ellen Galinsky and Kimberlee Salmond,
Families and Work Institute

Funded by The Colorado Trust

ASK THE CHILDREN™ STUDY SERIES

Ask the Children™ is a new program of work at Families and Work Institute (FWI) that investigates children's views of critical issues facing them as they grow up in today's world. Building on the success of Ellen Galinsky's recent book, *Ask the Children: The Breakthrough Study that Reveals How to Succeed at Work and Parenting* (2000), this series of studies is probing issues such as:

- Youth and employment
- Children and learning
- Children and values: What values are the most important to children and how do they define them?
- Children and the consumer culture
- Children and pressure in their lives
- What does "family" mean to children?
- Diversity: How do children feel about the diverse social world in which they live?
- Family communication: What works and what does not work from children's perspectives?
- New technology: Its impact on family life and children's relationships
- How do children see the roles of women and men?

While there are intense national debates about many of the issues facing young people, there have been few efforts to include their voices in these debates. The national discussion has typically revolved around adults "teaching," "helping," "mentoring," "rescuing," even "saving" children.

We believe it is time to include the views of youth. As reported in *Ask the Children*, what adults think that young people think and what young people actually think can be quite different. In addition, the solutions designed by adults to address the societal and economic issues concerning youth will be far more effective if youth are heard. As one young person said, "If we are PART OF THE PROBLEM, then we need to be PART OF THE SOLUTION."

Each of the projects in this series is developed in the same way. On the basis of information gleaned from literature reviews, panels of experts, and focus groups, we designed a survey that was administered to a nationally representative group of young people. The same survey was also administered to more than 1,000 young people in Colorado. The findings have important relevance for all those who care about and work with children: parents, teachers, community groups, philanthropic organizations, business leaders, and policy makers in the public and private sectors, and the public at large.

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We are also very grateful to Dana Markow and Marc Sheer from Harris Interactive, for reviewing the questionnaire and helping us fine-tune it, and managing the data collection process and to Humphrey Taylor for his guidance. Families and Work Institute colleagues, as always, have made invaluable contributions: James T. Bond for his statistical expertise and assistance; Erin Brownfield for directing the communication and publication process and proofing and editing; Kelly Sakai for helping coordinate and execute the communication and publication process; Stacey Block and Danielle Pomerniac for managing the number- and fact-checking; Carol Bryce Buchanan for her assistance in scheduling New York City-based focus groups; Nina Sazer O'Donnell and Marta Lopez for helping us conduct focus groups around the country; Barbara Norcia for her proof-reading and editing; and John Boose for designing and executing the lay-out of the publication. We are also deeply grateful to our wonderful colleague, Hank O'Karma from New Screen Concepts, for developing accompanying videos of the findings.

Finally, we would like to extend our deepest thanks to the youth in this study, who spoke openly and candidly with us in focus groups, in reviewing the study questionnaire, in responding to the questionnaire itself, and in commenting on the findings for the accompanying videos.

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Each time young people have turned weapons on their parents, their teachers, or their classmates over the past several years, we as a nation have been collectively stunned. We have asked ourselves what could have possibly gone so wrong. How could these acts of senseless violence have occurred? And what could we, and what should we, do about it?

The Colorado Trust has been addressing the issue of youth and violence for almost a decade. Since the mid-1990s, The Trust, a grantmaking foundation, has committed more than $36 million to better understanding and helping to improve positive youth development and preventing youth violence in Colorado. Among other things, The Trust wanted to know how and if Colorado children's experiences with violence differ from those of children around the country.

Although there have been numerous studies of young people and violence, **no representative study of children in Colorado or across the country has ever specifically asked young people to say—in their own words—what they would do to stop violence in any aspect of their lives.**[1]

This Ask The Children study, *Youth and Violence*, is the result of a more than three-year journey—a collaboration between The Colorado Trust and the Families and Work Institute, with additional support and counsel from the Open Society Institute.

We began by interviewing experts on youth and violence, reviewing the literature, and talking with young people all over the country to ask them about their opinions and experiences with youth violence. We also partnered with the National Conference of State Legislatures, inviting their members to help frame the study questions so that the findings are relevant to policy and action.

On the basis of this information, we designed a survey that Harris Interactive conducted from October through December 2001 with 1,012 young people in Colorado in the fifth through twelfth grades. A parallel study of a nationally representative group of 1,001 young people was also conducted during this time frame.[2] Findings in this report are from the Colorado sample with comparisons to the national sample. There is also a separate report with the national findings and accompanying videos that go with the reports, and a summary of the findings.[3] Unless otherwise noted, all children's quotes in this report are from Colorado youth.[4] Overall, **we find few differences between what young people in Colorado and young people around the country said**, but we have discussed the differences that do emerge. **For example, reports by principals on the frequency of violence in their schools are higher in Colorado, even though Colorado and national youth do not report experiencing violence at different rates. In addition, kids in Colorado are more likely to say they feel *very safe* at school compared to the national sample.**

as one young person explained, "if we are part of the PROBLEM, then we need to be part of the SOLUTION"

The intent in designing this study has been to look beyond the actual experiences young people have with violence. Our aim has been to dig deeper by examining the relationships young people have in their schools, homes, and communities and by looking at what aspects of kids' lives are associated with lower risks of all types of violence—extreme (such as attack-

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ing someone with a weapon); physical (such as hitting, shoving, and kicking); and emotional (teasing, gossiping, picking on).

Youth and Violence is part of a series of Ask The Children studies being conducted with a similar methodology by the Families and Work Institute and based on the premise that it is crucial to include young people's voices on the major issues they face growing up. As one young person explained, "If we are PART OF THE PROBLEM, then we need to be PART OF THE SOLUTION."

There are those who might say that young people's opinions don't matter much. What do young people know? After all, they haven't seen much of life, and will probably just defend themselves, their families, and the way they live.

On the contrary, the Families and Work Institute has found that young people's views matter a great deal. We find that they bring considerable and often unexpected insights and understanding to the burning issues in their lives.

This is the **first** study that has directly asked a statewide group and a nationally representative group of young people for their own solutions for violence in all aspects of their lives. We asked these young people to answer the following question in their own words:

"If you could make one change that would help stop the violence that young people experience today, what would that change be?"

As a state legislator interviewed by the National Conference of State Legislatures said, "I have learned that kids in schools are open to talking, can identify problems and offer solutions, but we **must** listen."

By listening to what young people have to say about their experiences with violence, their lives today, and what they think will stop violence, we learn important truths about ourselves and the world in which we live. Now more than ever, it is important to pay attention to how the experiences and relationships of young people affect the way they learn to handle and interpret conflict.

this is the FIRST study that has directly asked a statewide and nationally representative group of young people for THEIR OWN SOLUTIONS FOR VIOLENCE in all aspects of their lives

WHAT KIDS WOULD DO TO STOP VIOLENCE

FINDING ONE: IN ORDER TO END VIOLENCE, YOU HAVE TO START WITH EMOTIONAL VIOLENCE—"LET'S ACCEPT EACH OTHER"

We wanted to know what young people would do to reduce the amount of violence they experience today. Peter Fonagy, the director of the Child and Family Center at the Menninger Foundation, put it well when he said, "It is far more important to have a good map of how the child feels violence is created if one is trying to implement preventions."

Our conversations with children indicated that they have many solutions to curbing violence in their home lives, schools, and communities. The solutions they offer speak to how much they want things to be different. As one girl says:

> *If I could make one change that would help stop the violence that young people experience today, I would invent some type of invisible protection suit for the kids that get bullied, hit, or hurt year round.* - Girl, 11

Although the public debates about violence have focused on **extreme violence**—such as school shootings—as emblematic of a major societal problem among young people, when asked what they would do to stop violence in our open-ended survey question, it is perhaps surprising that the largest proportion—35 percent—write about different and far more prevalent forms of violence. While they do write about **physical violence** such as hitting, a very significant number write about teasing that goes beyond being playful and gets mean; about put-downs and gossip that are cruel; and about rejection as a very real violence to them. We call this **emotional violence**.[5]

Why is emotional violence so important to young people? Because they believe that insensitivity and meanness can be triggers for more extreme kinds of violence. Furthermore, emotional violence obviously hurts children. Getting teased, picked on, rejected, and ignored can be a very painful experience.

This 35 percent includes 13 percent who write specifically about ending teasing, gossiping, bullying, meanness, and insults. To end violence, they say:

> *Lessen the bullying, teasing, and general improper behavior within groups of peers.* - Boy, 17

> *I would change that people stopped teasing other people because it's mean and can hurt someone.* - Girl, 12

> *One thing I would change is the harsh verbal communication between people.* - Girl, 13

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Their words might sound naïve to some adults—"let's accept each other"—yet behind their words is a profound insight: that discrimination against others who are different is a root cause of violence. In fact, 7 percent write specifically about ending violence by shifting the culture so that shutting individuals out who seem different becomes unacceptable.

Different doesn't just mean race, they say:[6]

> *If I could change something it would be the way people treat each other. I would change things so that everyone accepted everyone for who they are.* - Boy, 15

> *I would change the way people see themselves and each other. I wish people were more accepting of people who have problems or are different in some way. Then there wouldn't be as much pointless fighting and hurt over stupid things.* - Girl, 15

> *I would make everyone appreciate the differences in everyone.* - Boy, 19

> *Make everyone blind, so no violence was because of how people look.* - Boy, 16

Seven percent write that young people should work at getting to know each other better, at being nicer and friendlier:

there is clearly a "disconnect" between what adults and young people think

> *If I could change anything I would change the way people act to each other. I think people should be nice to each other and no matter what. People should care about others' feelings and they should always talk to their friends if they get mad at them and get the problem solved right away before it blows up.* - Girl, 19

> *The one thing I would do is to take all the hurt out of everyone and show them everything can be OK if they just talk it out! I would love to put a smile on everyone's face and show them no matter what race or religion you are you can be friends.* - Boy, 12

One young woman speaks specifically about the changed world in which we live:

> *I would want to change people's attitude toward others. The September 11th incidents have changed some people, but not all at our school, church, and home. I've noticed so much more kindness and respect for people and I think that has changed our nation incredibly. But there are still some people with negative attitudes that I would like to change.* - Girl, 13

Another 6 percent write about solving problem between people in more positive ways than hurting each other physically or emotionally. This includes both actual strategies, such as interventions and classes, as well as a general better understanding of ways to resolve problems without resorting to violence.

> *I would put everyone in anger management classes so that they would learn how to love instead of violence. I think if everybody learned together it would ensure a bonding time and it would decrease people's violent reactions.* - Girl, 15

I would have bully-proofing classes in every school. - Girl, 12

I would make everyone see things from all perspectives and make them realize that life isn't so bad if you just get through the tough times. You got to keep on keepin' on! Life's a garden, dig it! - Boy, 16

I would try to talk through things when someone is trying to be violent with someone else. - Boy, 13

Finally, 3 percent talk about ending physical violence, even horsing around, because it too can lead to extreme violence.

I would stop all of the fighting over stupid stuff that goes on and causes violence among young people. - Girl, 16

In addition, one young person writes about the harmful effects of the negative assumptions adults have about children. To reduce violence, her answer is:

The stereotyping done by adults. Adults expect teenagers to be violent, disruptive people. I believe this only encourages the very behavior that so many adults fear. - Girl, 17

According to a review of polling data on youth violence, solutions such as these that focus on emotional violence are not even on the radar screen when adults are polled about remedies. There is clearly a "disconnect" between what adults and young people think (ClearVision/NCAYV, 2001)!

Table 1: Suggestions for stopping violence

STOP OR CHANGE THE SMALLER THINGS THAT LEAD TO MORE EXTREME VIOLENCE	35%
Stop emotional violence: teasing/gossiping/putting each other down/ bullying/meanness/ insults/making fun of each other	13%
Be friends/be nice/have everyone get along	7%
Get young people to talk it out/adults to talk to them about alternatives and consequences/young people to think before they act	6%
Be more tolerant of differences/equality/have respect/end hatred/ end racial discrimination	6%
Stop physical violence-fighting/hitting/pushing/shoving	3%

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Table 1: Continued

HAVE GUN CONTROL, MORE SECURITY, AND STRICTER PUNISHMENTS	**21%**
Enact gun and weapon control	11%
Send offenders to jail/provide more severe punishments	6%
Provide more police/law enforcement/better security	4%
ADULTS BE MORE AWARE/TREAT KIDS WITH MORE RESPECT/MORE TRUST	**1%**
IMPROVE FAMILY LIFE/PARENT RELATIONSHIPS	**4%**
IMPROVE SCHOOL LIFE	**5%**
Things about the school/the way it runs	2%
Improve teachers/relationships with teachers	2%
Provide more educational programs/after-school activities	1%
CLEAN UP/IMPROVE THE CULTURE	**16%**
Help violent people be less violent/stop the violence in general	5%
Get rid of drugs and alcohol	3%
Stop TV/media/video violence	3%
Increase religious involvement	2%
Stop sexual harassment	1%
Be peaceful/world peace	1%
Get rid of gangs	1%
MAKE SELF IMPROVEMENTS/SET EXAMPLES	**1%**

Table 1: Continued

NO SOLUTIONS/MISCELLANEOUS	16%
Don't know	5%
Can't do anything	5%
Fight violence with violence	2%
Miscellaneous	4%

Does not add up to 100%, due to rounding.

As one young person told us in a focus group in Colorado, finding solutions to ending emotional violence, respecting your classmates and being nice to others can be as easy as a smile: "There are a lot of things to improve any community—school or work. Things like smiling at people in the hallway, opening doors for people. Making a school a better place."

Another young person spoke more directly about little things that he personally does to try to make the environment a little friendlier: "There are so many insensitive people around. Do simple things—like asking, 'How was your day?' You need to pay attention to the people who are quiet and in the corners. I go up to the kids in the corners, I just say, 'What's up?'"

These comments remind us that changing small things can make a big difference.

FINDING TWO: EMOTIONAL VIOLENCE IS A PART OF MANY KIDS EVERYDAY LIVES

Some people may not see teasing, picking on, and rejecting other kids in mean ways as a part of the violence continuum, but the kids in this study say otherwise. Emotional violence can really hurt. While they say that emotional violence can lead to physical and more extreme forms of violence, it deserves attention on its own, even if it does not lead to any other form of violence. For example, as we will discuss later in the report, young people who report being on the receiving end of emotional violence are more likely to exhibit low levels of self-esteem. As child psychiatrist Dan Siegel from the University of California, Los Angeles, put it, experiences with all kinds of violence can have the effect of "shattering children's faith in the goodness of people."

emotional violence can really hurt

To assess how often young people experience different kinds of violence, we adapted a measure that has been used by the Hamilton Fish National Institute on School and Community Violence at the George Washington University. Young people were asked

how often in the past month they have the following experiences—either because someone had done it to them **on purpose** or they had done it to someone else **on purpose**. We find that, in fact, emotional violence is a part of many young people's everyday lives. As Table 2 illustrates, in the preceding month, two-thirds of young people (67%) have been teased and gossiped about; more than half (61%) have been rejected or ignored; and just under one-third (32%) have been bullied *at least once*. Full results on the prevalence of all forms of violence items can be found in Appendix 1, Tables 33 and 34.

Interestingly, fewer young people say they have carried out each of these actions than have experienced them. For example, while 67 percent say they have been teased or gossiped about in a mean way, fewer— 57 percent—admit to doing this to others *at least once* in the past month.

We can think of several reasons that might explain these discrepancies. We did not ask young people to say who teased, rejected or gossiped about them or where these insults took place—clearly the aggressors could be adults as well as kids. Also, young people—like adults—may be less willing to admit to wrongdoing than being wronged. Some kids also may have become insensitive to insults. The seriousness of the action may be more obvious to the victim than the aggressor; that is, the aggressor might think that he or she is just fooling around in a harmless sort of way, while the victim may interpret the action as hostile. In addition, it is indeed possible that reports of aggression might be the result of one person in a classroom or community—not many. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the incidence of emotional violence is high.

Table 2: Percentage of young people experiencing emotional violence on purpose at least once *in the past month*

	% victimized by this behavior *at least once*	% carried out this behavior *at least once*
Teased or gossiped in a mean way	67%	57%
Rejected or ignored	61%^	49%^
Bullied	32%	29%^

^indicates statistical differences between national and Colorado sample at .01

Although we find some differences in rates of victimization and aggression between youth nationally and in Colorado, enough of a pattern does not emerge for us to draw any definitive conclusions based on our data. Young people in Colorado are slightly more likely to bully *at least once* in the past month than young people around the country, as well as slightly more likely to be rejected or ignored, and reject and ignore others.[7] However, these items are the only ones in all of the emotional, physical, and extreme categories where small differences exist.

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When it comes to repeated emotional violence, the numbers go down. Between about one in three to one in eight young people (29% to 13%) experience emotional violence on a regular basis, or *five times or more* in the past month. And between about one in eight to one in 16 (12% to 6%) hurt others repeatedly in emotional ways (see Table 3).

Table 3: Percentage of young people experiencing emotional violence on purpose five times or more *in the past month*

	% victimized by this behavior *five times or more*	% carried out this behavior *five times or more*
Teased or gossiped in a mean way	29%	12%
Rejected or ignored	21%	10%
Bullied	13%	6%

A number of young people are proactive in stopping violence

Is the glass half full or half empty? One can look at the prevalence of emotional violence among young people in both ways. While the percentages of young people who experience these forms of violence are disturbingly high, it is important to note that substantial numbers of young people say that they have **not** experienced emotional violence in the past month. For example, one-third have **not** been teased or gossiped about in a mean way even once and just under half (46%) likewise have **not** been rejected or ignored.

Although adults may believe that banding together in groups or cliques, and then gossiping about, teasing and rejecting those on the outside is a normal part of forming an identity for young people, our findings imply that it does not have to be like this. As we have said, a significant number of young people do **not** experience emotional violence.

This fact—that a substantial minority of students does not experience emotional violence—indicates that **efforts to curb emotional violence are indeed well within our reach**; that growing up as a young person in this country does not necessarily mean having to be ridiculed and picked on. Measures to decrease the amount of emotional violence young people experience could very well take root and be successful, as long as they are well done.

We also find that most young people have tried to stop potentially difficult situations so that others are not hurt:

- 76 percent of young people report they helped someone else solve an argument so that no one got hurt *at least once* in the past month.

- 67 percent have been helped by someone else to solve an argument so that no one got hurt *at least once* in the past month.

While it is definitely encouraging that so many young people have been involved in constructive problem solving, there is a caveat in interpreting the above results. The fact that so many young people either need assistance or need to give assistance in resolving conflict is perhaps an indication that they indeed really **need** and **want** help.

the fact that so many young people either need assistance or need to give assistance in resolving conflict could be an indication that CHILDREN INDEED REALLY NEED AND WANT THE HELP

However, it is evident that young people can and do help others solve problems constructively and they are open to others helping them do the same.

Girls and boys are equally likely to be mean to each other

Over the past several years, waves of books have focused first on the plight of one gender growing up, then the other.

In 1994's *Reviving Ophelia*, clinical psychologist Mary Pipher argued that girls grow up in a "girl-poisoning" culture with a narrow definition of what it means to be female. Among the results—depression and a plunging loss of self-esteem. Over the next four years, her chorus was joined by others who wrote that boys are in gender straight-jackets, too. These books include William Pollock's 1998 *Real Boys* and Daniel J. Kindlon and Michael Thompson's 1999 *Raising Cain*. The authors argued that the myths of what it means to be male lead to what Kindlon and Thompson term a "culture of cruelty" and a "tyranny of toughness."

This year, a new group of books was published contending that boys aren't the only ones who can be cruel. The recent books about "mean girls" include *Queen Bees and Wannabes* by Rosalind Wiseman and *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls* by Rachel Simmons.

our study points to the NEED to focus on both girls and boys

Our study points to the need to focus on both girls and boys. We find that there are no **overall** differences between boys and girls in being on the receiving end of emotional violence.[8] There are differences, however, in rejecting and ignoring others at the extremes. But no, it isn't girls doing it. It's boys who are actually more likely to report rejecting and ignoring others at high frequencies in the past month**.[9] Of course, the subtle ways that girls and boys tease and talk about each other can be very different, necessitating different remedies. And boys are more likely than girls to commit and be on the receiving end of physical violence**. (Please see footnotes eight and nine for an explanation of the asterixes in the text.)

FINDING THREE: PHYSICAL AND EXTREME VIOLENCE IS WIDESPREAD TOO

Almost one in two kids experiences physical violence *at least once* a month

Physical violence happens less frequently than teasing, gossiping and rejecting. It happens more frequently than bullying, however. For example, 67 percent of young people have been teased or gossiped about in a mean way *at least once* in the last month compared with 46 percent who have been hit, shoved, kicked or tripped. (See Table 4.) This means that almost one in two young people have been hurt physically at least once in the past month—whether the aggressors are other kids or adults!

Table 4: Percentage of young people who have experienced physical violence on purpose at least once *in the past month*

	% victimized by this behavior *at least once*	% carried out this behavior *at least once*
Hit, shoved, kicked, or tripped	46%	35%
Pulled, twisted, squeezed, or pinched part of body	42%	26%

As Table 5 indicates, far fewer young people experience physical violence on a more regular basis, *five times or more* in the past month.

Table 5: Percentage of young people who have experienced physical violence five times or more *in the past month*

	% victimized by this behavior *five times or more*	% carried out this behavior *five times or more*
Hit, shoved, kicked, or tripped	18%	10%
Pulled, twisted, squeezed, or pinched part of body	15%	8%

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What leads kids to fight? Are some situations more pernicious than others? One of the experts we interviewed, Sandy Newman, president of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, suggested that we explore the triggers for violence, including the role of the bystander or onlooker. Are young people more likely to fight if they are surrounded by peers than if they are all alone? We also heard in our focus groups that the concepts of "saving face" and not being disrespectful are very prominent for a number of young people. One young woman told us that, "If you walk into a room and somecne gives you a dirty look...all of the attention is on you to do something."

So we addressed these issues in our survey. The results indicate that kids are most likely to fight if they are hit, or to right an insult against a friend or family member. Full findings can be found in Appendix 1, Table 40.

- 66 percent are *very* or *somewhat likely* to physically fight if they are hit, and 61 percent are *very or somewhat likely* to physically fight if one of their friends or family members is insulted.

- The majority of young people, however, are ***not*** *very likely* or ***not*** *at all likely* to try and physically fight someone if they are insulted, whether alone (66%) or with a group of other people (66%). Conversely, this means that more than one-third will fight under these circumstances.

Thus, while the majority of young people are not likely to fight based on being personally insulted without accompanying physical violence, it does appear that many will fight back or fight in order to defend a friend or family member.

One in 12 young people experiences extreme violence

Just under 10 percent (8% or 9%) of young people report experiencing **extreme violence** (being attacked with a weapon or forced to do sexual acts) *at least once* in the past month, while 4 to 5 percent report committing these acts on others *at least once*. In a hypothetical classroom of 25 kids, this means that two or more kids could have been attacked by a weapon or forced into doing sexual acts. (See Table 6.)

in a hypothetical classroom of 25 kids, this means that two or more kids could have been attacked by a weapon or forced into doing sexual acts

Table 6: Percentage of young people who have experienced extreme violence on purpose at least once *in the past month*

	% victimized by this behavior *at least once*	% carried out this behavior *at least once*
Attacked with a weapon	9%	5%
Forced to do sexual acts	8%	4%

As Table 7 demonstrates, fewer young people experience extreme violence on a regular basis, *five times or more* in the past month.

Table 7: Percentage of young people who have experienced extreme violence on purpose five times or more *in the past month*

	% victimized by this behavior *five times or more*	% carried out this behavior *five times or more*
Attacked with a weapon	2%	2%
Forced to do sexual acts	4%	2%

We also asked the principals of the schools that participated in our survey to report the amount of violence that occurs on school grounds, including serious violent incidents (examples include rape, physical attack, or fights with weapons or robbery); less serious violent incidents (such as possession of weapons or physical fights without weapons); and incidents or threats of violence, or sexual, racial, or ethnic harassment. We find that serious violent incidents occur infrequently in the majority of schools. A complete table of findings for principals can be found in Appendix 1, Table 43.

- 60 percent of principals report that serious violent incidents in fact *never* occur at their schools. However, 5 percent report them happening *about once a month* and 4 percent *once a week*. Nationally, 71 percent of principals report that serious violent incidents *never* occur.

- Less serious violent events happen more frequently. A third of principals say that these occur *about once or twice a year* and 10 percent say they occur *about once a week*. However, only 5 percent report them happening daily.

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- Incidents or threats of violence, or sexual, racial, or ethnic harassment occur the most frequently, according to the reports of principals. A quarter of principals say this happens *daily* and 20 percent *about once a month*. Ten percent say it happens *about once a week*.

We are struck by the fact that reports by principals of serious violence in Colorado schools are greater than the reports of violence by principals nationally. As we will discuss later, however, students in fact feel safer at school in Colorado than do students around the country. Thus, one could surmise that increased awareness has made schools and principals in Colorado more vigilant and likely to report these events, not that these events are actually more likely to occur in Colorado.

Furthermore, although principals in Colorado report more serious violent incidents than do principals around the country, kids in Colorado do not report **experiencing** serious violence more than kids do around the country. As we have already discussed, there are no differences between the amount of physical and extreme violence that kids in Colorado and kids in other states experience. That is, although principals are more likely in Colorado to report serious violent incidents happening at their school, kids in Colorado are no more likely to report being the aggressor or victim of such behavior. This supports the hypothesis that it is perception and awareness, rather than actual violent events, that are causing this difference.

FACTS ABOUT THE FINDINGS

- Younger children (in the fifth through eighth grades) are more likely to be bullied than are older children, as well as hit, shoved, kicked, or tripped**.
- Older children (in the ninth through twelfth grades) are more likely to tease and gossip** and pull, twist, squeeze, or pinch a part of someone else's body*.
- When we examine findings by size of place (comparing those children going to school in rural, urban, and suburban areas based on principal report), we find that children in rural areas are more likely to have been hit, shoved, kicked, or tripped** and had a body part pulled, twisted, squeezed, or pinched*. This is not consistent with our national findings, which indicate that children in urban or suburban areas are more likely to commit some forms of physical and extreme violence.
- We find basically no differences between racial/ethnic groups and frequency of victimization and aggression.[10] Since a number of studies find that family socioeconomic status is a more important predictor of both victimization and aggression than race/ethnicity, we took this into account by controlling for perceived family economic health. When we do this, we find that white, non-Hispanic young people are more likely to have been rejected or ignored**. This is the only difference we find by race/ethnicity when taking socioeconomic status into consideration. In the national sample, we find that black or African-American young people are more likely to have had a body part pulled, twisted, squeezed, or pinched**, and are also more likely to pull, twist, squeeze, or pinch someone else's body part**. They are also more likely to reject and ignore others**.
- We find a much more significant relationship between perceived family economic health and violent outcomes, in that those children who say they are in poorer financial shape are more likely to be victims and aggressors of different kinds of violence*. Full findings of perceived family economic health appear later in the report in the section on the overall culture, and the family income scale appears in Appendix 1, Table 44.

FINDING FOUR: "WHEN PEOPLE PUT OTHER PEOPLE DOWN, THEY CAN GET VIOLENT"

The young people we talked with in focus groups had several theories about violence and what leads to violent behavior. The first theory we have already discussed: Many kids believe that insensitivity and meanness can be triggers for more harmful kinds of violence. A young woman in one of our focus groups was blunt about the link between emotional, physical, and extreme violence. She said, "The whole picking on each other is definitely a big issue, as you see in almost every shooting—it is said that the killer was definitely picked on."

We hear again and again that small everyday put-downs are the breeding ground for more serious violence. To end violence, young people who participated in our survey say:

> *Stop having everybody being teased because it leads into bigger problems.* - Boy, 15

> *I would have kids quit bullying each other or making fun of people (to their face or not). Because that builds up a lot of unneeded tension that can lead to a dangerous situation. I think kids just need to learn how to accept each other.* - Girl, 15

> *The one thing I would change is gossiping/talking behind people's back in a negative way. That tends to start 90% of the violence at school. He say, she say...* - Girl, 17

Although a study such as ours can't determine cause and effect, we can explore the connections between emotional and physical violence. We wondered:

- Are victims of emotional violence more likely to also be victims of physical violence?
- Are aggressors in committing emotional violence also aggressors when it comes to physical violence?

In both cases, the answer is yes. For example, victims of emotional violence are more likely to be victims of physical violence**:

- 57 percent of young people who have been rejected or ignored *at least once* in the past month have also been hit, shoved, kicked, or tripped—compared with 29 percent of young people who have **not** been rejected or ignored.

And aggressors in emotional violence are more likely to be aggressors when it comes to physical violence**:

- 49 percent of young people who have rejected or ignored someone else *at least once* in the past month have also hit, shoved, kicked, or tripped someone—compared with 22 percent of those have not rejected or ignored others.

Another question is:

- Are young people who are hurt more likely to hurt others?

Again, our study can't say which comes first—hurting or being hurt—but we can see if they go together (see Table 8). And yes, we find that there is a clear and strong connection between these two experiences**. For example:

- 68 percent of young people who have been teased or gossiped about in a mean way *at least once* in the past month do the same to others—compared with 33 percent of those who haven't experienced being teased.
- 59 percent of young people who have been hit, shoved, kicked, or tripped *at least once* in the past month do the same to others—compared with 15 percent of those who haven't experienced this.
- 31 percent of those who have been attacked with a weapon *at least once* in the past month attack others—compared with only 2 percent who have not had this experience.
- And 39 percent of those who were forced to do sexual acts *at least once* in the past month have forced sexual violence on others, compared with only 1 percent of non-victims.

Larry Aber, director of the National Center for Children in Poverty at the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University, explained how he saw these connections. He noted that experiences with emotional violence, including bullying, don't result in violence most of the time—but that such experiences can possibly create a cumulative effect, "coloring a child's perceptions of what life is like," and possibly making him or her believe that it is okay to hurt others.

Table 8: Percentage of victims and non-victims who have been aggressors of emotional, physical, and extreme violence at least once *in the past month*

	Sig	% victims carrying out *at least once*	% non-victims carrying out *at least once*
Teased or gossiped in a mean way	**	68%	33%
Rejected or ignored	**	61%	30%
Bullied	**	46%	21%
Hit, shoved, kicked, or tripped	**	59%	15%
Pulled, twisted, squeezed, or pinched part of body	**	50%	8%
Attacked with a weapon	**	31%	2%
Forced to do sexual acts	**	39%	1%

The Mantel-Haenszel (linear by linear) chi-square test was used to test associations.
*Significance: **=p<.01*

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Clearly, our statistical analysis reveals that there are connections between being harmed and harming. Violence seems to create a vicious cycle—it's hard to know where blame and responsibility begin and end.

violence seems to create a vicious cycle— it's hard to know where BLAME AND RESPONSIBILITY begin and end

FINDING FIVE: A CULTURE THAT CELEBRATES THE ONE RIGHT WAY TO BE "IN"—"NEEDS TO END"

The public debates have tended to focus blame and remedies for youth violence on parents and/or the schools; however, reading the write-in suggestions from young people for ending violence indicate that many of their experiences go beyond seeing one group of adults or another at fault. Instead many tend to focus on the larger culture.

As one young person explains from our national survey:

> *There needs to be better morals everywhere. Friends, parents, teachers, and family need to set examples. TV, movies, magazines, books and other entertainment need to become cleaner. There are many things that need to be changed.* - Boy, 15

As we read their responses, we could see that many children experience a seemingly inescapable culture where differences are put down, not valued. It isn't simply the way that parents, teachers, or other adults around them act, although these relationships are extremely important. It is more pervasive.

Strikingly, 6 percent of young people's suggestions center on discrimination—discrimination broadly defined that includes how kids look, how they dress, and how popular they are.

Their comments caused us to look at the everyday process of growing up through a different lens and see a culture that often celebrates sameness, being "in." We also see purposeful, negative emphasis of differences everywhere—in television shows, in movies, and in music. It is how a number of products are sold and the way much business is conducted. Put downs are the language of the street, media, business, and politics. Though some of this can be humorous and fun, it can also cross the line and be hurtful.

Fortunately, there is growing awareness of this issue and many efforts to redress it. However, more work is necessary. A number of kids talk about having to adhere to what's "in" to feel accepted. This could be anything from wearing the right brand of shoes to liking a certain style of music. They talk about changing themselves—almost abandoning their true selves—to fit into a mold that characterizes youth and adult culture. Why does this culture feel seemingly inescapable? Because young people feel that they have to join in, in order to protect themselves.

young people are holding up a mirror to some aspects of our way of life and FINDING IT FAULTY

In a very real sense, through their words, young people are holding up a mirror to some aspects of our way of life and finding it faulty. **What young people are saying is complex because they are advocating for accepting the commonality, the basic humanity of all people, while accepting each of our differences:**

> *I think the biggest cause of violence is the differences among youth. I think if we could change as a whole to be more tolerant, patient, and understanding of others then the problem of violence would be greatly reduced.* - Girl, 17

Some young people write that an emphasis on the one right way to be "in"—and discrimination against those who are different—have racial and/or class antecedents. To stop violence, they say:

> *Change the way people think about others. Don't let anyone think that skin color means being different from those with other skin colors. Teach people that everyone really is equal.* - Girl, 17

> *The way people see each other as far as human beings rather than race.* - Girl, 16

> *If I could make one change I would make people forget about racism.* - Boy, 14

In addition, it was evident to us in the focus groups we conducted in Colorado that racism can play a big part in the lives of many children in the state. As one young person of color explained, "I go places and they see me a different way. Mostly in stores, sometimes in schools though, they will help out white students more than us because they'll think, 'Well why does he want his education, why don't I help this person who might go somewhere?'"

One young boy even said, "I wish everyone in the world was **clear** [meaning no color]." He suggested that this would stop people from picking on each other because of their race.

Another repeated comment from young people was the idea: "If you take black, white, Mexican or other people and you poke their fingers, red blood comes out."

We find that the vast majority of young people are opposed to racial and ethnic discrimination. Appendix 1, Table 41 contains the full results.

- Almost nine in 10 (88%) of young people disagree with the statement that it's OK to make jokes about or avoid people from different racial or ethnic backgrounds (69% *strongly* and 19% *somewhat*).
- 96 percent of young people agree that it is OK to have a friend from a different racial or ethnic group (86% *strongly* and 10% *somewhat*).

It is important to note that while it is good news that high numbers of young people say they are opposed to racial discrimination, the fact remains that young people do believe it is a pervasive catalyst for violence.

FINDING SIX: A SIZEABLE PROPORTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE CALL ON ADULTS TO HELP THEM FEEL SAFE—"CHANGE THE ENVIRONMENT WHERE CRIME AND POVERTY ARE BRED"

For some young people, their communities are scary. One says:

> *I'd change the way they live, because most people that are violent usually grew up in a violent neighborhood...* - Boy, 14

When asked what they would do to stop violence, the second largest proportion—21 percent—of kids focus on measures that would help them feel safe.

Feeling safe is of concern to kids

We also heard about the issue of safety time and time again in our focus groups. So in our survey, we ask kids how safe they feel at home, at school, and in their neighborhoods. We find that young people feel the safest at home (82% feel *very safe*). Young people feel less safe at school and in their neighborhoods; 12 percent say they don't feel safe at school and 12 percent again say they don't feel safe in their neighborhoods. (See Table 9.)

Table 9: Percentage of young people who feel safe...

	At Home	At School	In Their Neighborhood
% feeling *very safe*	82%	47%^	51%
% feeling *somewhat safe*	16%	42%^	37%
% feeling *not very safe, not safe at all*	3%	12%^	12%

^indicates statistical differences between national and Colorado sample at .01

It is striking that significantly more young people in Colorado feel *very safe* at school than young people do nationally (47% in Colorado versus 39% in the national sample). We can think of a few possible explanations for this difference. Perhaps in response to Columbine, Colorado schools have mobilized faster and in a more directed fashion toward alleviating the fears of students and parents and making their schools safer than schools nationally. This could mean more school programs, more school security, stricter punishments, better communication between parents, educators, and students, and heightened awareness in general. While this study cannot test these hypotheses, if indeed Colorado schools are doing something different that is making young people feel safer at school, their programs could be emulated around the country. This finding is also significant since young

people in Colorado do not report being victims or aggressors of physical or extreme violence less frequently than young people nationally.

Approximately one in nine youth call for gun control— "Take guns away from kids"

Of the 21 percent of children who write about keeping kids safe by controlling access to guns, increasing security measures, and punishing offenders, 11 percent speak out directly against guns:

It would be that the people who make guns will never make guns or fake guns again and I mean that. No guns in the world! - Girl, 12

I would take away all the weapons such as knives, guns, drugs, and all other weapons used to kill or hurt people. - Girl, 11

The change would be no weapons. That's why I think there is so much violence...people kill so much people with weapons. - Girl, 11

While some young people would get rid of all weapons, no exceptions, others say that the military, law enforcement, or registered individuals are the only ones who need arms.

I would do what Britain did, and take away handguns and restrict the use of rifles to registered citizens. - Boy, 16

Guns and other killing weapons should be only used in the military. - Boy, 12

One respondent offers an interesting solution to the proliferation of hunting firearms:

The thing I would do is that the only time to have a gun is during hunting season. After hunting season they would give it back to the store. The store would keep it until hunting season. - Girl, 11

Also, a number of young people in Colorado write about enforcing age restrictions on weapons. While they do not agree on a set age where one can own a weapon, they are making a connection between age/maturity and the ability to handle ownership responsibly.

I would make a certain age limit on weapons. - Boy, 14

I would not sell a gun to someone unless they were 25 years of age. - Boy, 11

If I could make one change that would stop violence I would make it illegal to have guns or knives for people under the age of 21. - Girl, 11

Kids also call for increasing security

An additional 4 percent write about providing more security measures, including increasing the numbers of police and having them better trained.

> *Hire more security guards, more policemen, and more FBI officials around the country to stop others from bullying, stealing, and doing wrong.* - Boy, 10

Young people have specific suggestions for increasing security. It is important to note, however, that we did not ask kids to rate which of these suggestions they had experienced, or to evaluate their effectiveness. So, while some kids endorse these ideas, others write against the idea of a lock-down society, particularly if adults act as if they don't trust or respect young people. The specific suggestions from young people include:

- Placing metal detectors in schools and stores
- Requiring see-through book bags
- Conducting locker checks
- Requiring school uniforms
- Placing monitoring cameras in public locations (especially for hard-to-see places, yet excluding more private domains such as bathrooms, cars, and houses)
- Instituting earlier curfews
- Providing more adult supervision everywhere including schools, playgrounds, and parks
- Insuring that the rules that do exist are enforced.

Furthermore, 6 percent believe that the solution lies in strict punishments. In their words:

> *That change would be to have stronger penalties for people that cause the violence. I think if the penalties were strong enough, then we would see a decrease in violence that young people experience today* - Girl, 16

> *I would make a new law that says if you hurt someone on purpose you go to jail.* - Girl, 11

> *Make the punishment more strict so it is not worth the risk of fighting.* - Boy, 12

Some young people see the solution as removing the troublemakers. For instance, one young person suggests:

> *I would have every kid that is a bully be sent off to a school for bullies. And if they are nice, send them back.* - Girl, 14

However, one young person cautions against being too punitive:

> *Provide punishment for violence that will help a young person. Not one that just locks kids up—help them see the wrong in what they did. Juvenile prison should not be an option.* - Boy, 15

RELATIONSHIPS IN THE LIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

As a prelude to conducting our survey, we interviewed:

- Leading experts on violence
- Former youth offenders who have turned their lives around and are now helping young people like themselves turn away from a life of crime
- Young people throughout the country.

Even though those we interviewed came from different backgrounds and had varied experiences, they had a uniform message: **Good relationships help protect children against violence.** Accordingly, if young people have friends, neighbors, teachers, and parents who are "there for them," they will be less likely to let the small grievances turn into emotional, physical, and extreme violence.

And the young people in our focus groups concurred. One girl said, "You need to have someone who will ask about your day and care about it. It's about whether they care about what you're going through and making an effort to understand why you are reacting the way you are."

GOOD RELATIONSHIPS help protect children against violence

These people can be adults. One of the most powerful statements about the importance of adults to young people came from a young man in a focus group in Colorado. He described the way it feels to be a teen: "You are young—you're a kid, and then you're an adult." It's a time, according to him of being "between two worlds" and belonging to neither. He said: "We would appreciate [adults'] help because we are going into their world and we're not going back to being a kid. I see two highways—a kid highway and an adult highway and a hole in the middle. You have to jump from one highway to another and we're flying in the middle and we don't know if we're going to land or not and we [need] assistance."

These people can also be friends. One focus group attendee spoke about her friends: "Support is a big thing. I think one person matters more than a group or clique. Knowing they're going through the same things you're going through. [Then] you're not struggling by yourself."

ACCORDING TO THE EXPERTS: WHAT KIDS NEED

William Morales, one of the experts we interviewed, shared his experiences from the vantage point of a former offender who turned his own life around. While he was in a prison cell, a gang shoot-out with the Boston police ended in the death of his younger brother. As a result, Morales now devotes himself to making sure that other kids do not end up in similar situations. He is director of the Egleston Square Youth Center and co-founder of the Youth & Police in Partnership Program. According to Morales, kids need:

- *Consistency in the guidelines they are given and reinforcement of those guidelines. When kids lack these, they are more likely to make bad choices.*
- *Support. Many are asked to grow up too fast and to make decisions without enough support. With support, they can manage—and manage even difficult situations—more effectively.*
- *Acceptance. They need places to go where they are cared about, so they don't have to turn to gangs to feel they belong.*

Willliam Morales and the other experts we interviewed also talked about a number of other things that they find that kids need:

- *Opportunities to talk in meaningful ways about their lives. Kids need someone who cares to talk with about their day, about what they are feeling and thinking.*
- *Models of success. Some young people think "success is something you possess" and relate success to the ownership of material items. It is important for them to hear the stories of people with whom they can identify who have succeeded.*
- *Positive attention. Young people who receive appropriate attention may not need to act out in negative ways to get attention.*
- *Activities they care about. Young people can do well when they have interests they care about and where they have a say about what they do.*
- *An understanding of the root causes of the issues they face. Young people need an understanding of their environment.*
- *An awareness of consequences. Some kids are fatalistic—they think that whatever happens will happen anyway. They need opportunities to set goals, to think about consequences, and to reflect on their situations and decisions.*

Theories of how relationships make a difference can be tested. We set out to explore the quality of relationships and experiences that young people have in their homes, schools, and with their friends, and whether or not they make a difference in their involvement in emotional, physical or extreme violence.

Overall, the answer is yes. That is to say, all sorts of relationships that young people have make a difference in the amount of violence young people are likely to expeeience. A more detailed analysis follows.

We will first address the types and qualities of relationships that young people have with their families and at home.

RELATIONSHIPS AT HOME

FINDING SEVEN: KIDS NEED THEIR PARENTS I KNOW WE CAN BE RUDE, BUT SOMETIMES ALL WE NEED IS A KIND WORD

When violence erupts among kids, the public typically points to the children's parents first, asking: "What did **they** do wrong?" A number of young people—4 percent—likewise point to parents when asked what they would do to stop violence:

> *Help the parents and home life. It starts with them. Have more counseling classes. Individual attention.* - Girl, 17

We are unsure what to make of the 4 percent figure—is it a large or small number?

We certainly find that parents and home life were seen as important to the children in the focus groups we conducted. As one child put it, "The biggest impact [on us] is home life." Perhaps it is like a fish not seeing the water it swims in—focusing on parents first and foremost is so obvious.

In fact, parents may be more important to their older children than parents themselves realize. One of the experts we interviewed, Laurence Steinberg, professor of psychiatry from Temple University, spoke about "the myth that [older] kids don't want to spend time with adults." As he noted, "Kids **do** want to spend time with adults."

From our Ask the Children study of employed parents (Galinsky, 2000), we know that parents of older children spend less time with their children than do parents with younger children. We also know that many parents are surprised when told that this study finds it is older children—more so than younger children—who especially yearn for more time with their fathers and mothers. While older children do push their parents away as they strive for more independence, they also want to connect with their parents.

And as one young person tells us, even if kids do not seem to want to spend time with adults, sometimes it is necessary for the parent to make the effort:

> *The change I would make would be that parents are more involved in their kids' personal lives even if the kid does not want them to be.* - Girl, 14

So we asked the young people we talked with about what mothers/fathers do that makes the biggest difference in shielding them from violence.[11] Experts weighed in on this subject as well. Among the issues considered critical are paying attention to, monitoring, and communicating well with young people; encouraging their interests; and helping young people solve problems constructively.

1) Paying attention to, monitoring, and communicating well with children

The issue of neglected children loomed large, both with the children and the experts as relates to potential violence.

Among the experts we interviewed, Barbara O'Brien, executive director of the Colorado Children's Campaign, suggested that we look at children's feelings of anonymity and its link to violence. Peter Fonagy, director of the Child and Family Center at The Menninger Foundation, also emphasized the potential connections between early neglect, later meanness by kids, and violence. He said that early neglect can leave children vulnerable to peer pressure and bullying later on. So if these young people are subjected to prolonged brutalizing by other kids, they then may be more likely to "flip into violence."

17 percent of kids feel "NOT NOTICED"—almost invisible—at home

One image of neglect seems to have lodged in the public's consciousness, it was mentioned by so many: Students making weapons in their own homes and of the parents being clueless. According to one young woman:

> *Make parents get involved with their kids so that they know what the hell is going on.* - Girl, 17

Other young people suggest:

> *Have parents be more aware of what their kids are doing, who their friends are, and what they're involved in. Better communication can also help.* - Girl, 16

> *Better parenting. Parents aren't paying attention to the children in positive ways.* - Boy, 14

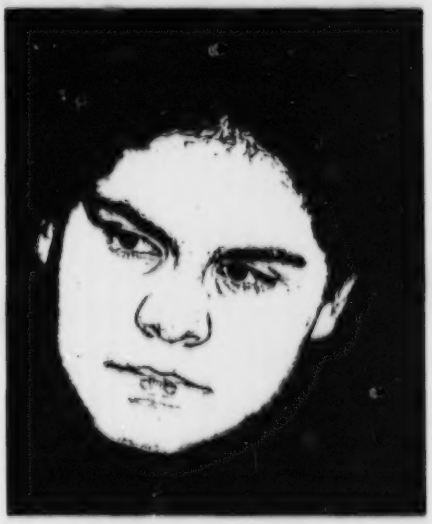
So what is really going on in families? How often do young people feel neglected—not noticed, invisible—when they are at home? While almost two-thirds *never* or *rarely* have this experience (61%), there are 17 percent for whom this experience occurs *often* or *very often*.

Table 10: Percentage of young people who feel that nobody notices them...

	At Home
% feeling nobody notices them *never*	30%
% feeling that nobody notices them *rarely*	32%
% feeling that nobody notices them *sometimes*	22%
% feeling that nobody notices them *often*	11%
% feeling nobody notices them *very often*	6%

We find that children who feel noticed more often are:

- Less likely to be victims of emotional and physical violence**. They are also less likely to be victims of a weapon attack** and be forced to do sexual acts*.
- Less likely to be aggressors of physical and extreme violence*, as well as less likely to bully* and reject** someone.



Studies of children's development have also revealed that parental monitoring, engagement, and involvement in their children's lives is important to assess. In his study of children and education, *Beyond the Classroom,* Laurence Steinberg, professor of psychiatry at Temple University, stated, "Parental engagement in their children's lives is one of the most important—if not the most important—contributors to healthy psychological development" (Steinberg, 1996, pp. 120-121).

So we asked a series of questions designed to address how engaged parents are with their children's lives.

According to young people, arguably the best critics, most parents do seem to know what is going on in some aspects of their children's lives. About one in five, however, says that his or her parents are not keeping tabs on friendships and what happens in their out-of-school time (see Table 11).

Table 11: Percentage of young people who say yes to the following statements

	Yes
My parents know what classes I am taking	92%
My parents know who most of my friends are	81%
My parents know what I do when I am not in school	80%

We find that young people who report that their parents know what classes they are taking, who there friends are, and what they do when they are not in school, are:

- Less likely to be victims of the majority of violent behaviors*.
- Less likely to be aggressors on the majority of violent behaviors*.

We wondered why some parents are not tuned into what their kids are doing. Has "parenting gone downhill," as one young person in the study asserts? Or are kids shutting out their parents?

Obviously parenting is not a one-way street. Young people with uninterested parents might eventually give up on trying to connect with them, but similarly, young people who push their parents away persistently, who are "rude" to them, may also wear down the good intentions of adults.

Good communication is seen as extremely important by all of the experts we interviewed. For example, Marqueece Harris-Dawson, who works with youth in South Central Los Angeles through an organization called South Central Youth Empowered Through Action, has observed that the young people most at risk for behaving violently are the poorest communicators. He noted that while they have trouble speaking or writing, "violence is a universal language."

Studies have also found that a number of parents and children are not communicating with each other about the things that parents ought to know. This happens especially with teenagers. Jim Garbarino, professor of human development at Cornell University and author of *Lost Boys* (1999) and *Parents Under Siege* (2001), has termed this phenomenon "the secret life of teenagers." In his studies, he and his colleagues have asked older students, "What did you do in high school that your parents didn't know about?" Among the Cornell sample, they found that many had done things that were dangerous, illegal, and provocative. For the most part, the young people kept these incidents hidden from their parents. Why? There are a number of explanations as to why this occurs. Perhaps teens have had the experience of adults dismissing the "trivial" issues that trouble kids so the kids shut down. Perhaps kids protect their parents from the things that might upset them. And perhaps kids feel that their parents wouldn't act appropriately if they found out—that they would make things worse—either because the adults don't know how to respond or because they are so overwhelmed with the stresses in their own lives that they can't cope. At the urging of Jim Garbarino, we asked young people whether they talked to their parents about the things that are important to them.

> *The violence is coming from the parents not talking to the child. So the problem is in people's houses.*
> - Boy, 17

We find a worrisome communication gap between parents and their children. Only half (50%) of preteens and teens talk to their parents *often* or *very often* about the things that are important to them (see Table 12). Some of this gap may be attributable to the developmental task of becoming more independent during the middle school and high school years. However, it is important to bear in mind that many kids in this study express a desire to talk to their parents more often than they do.

Table 12: Percentage of young people who talk often *or* very often *to...*

	Parents
% talking *often* or *very often* about what is important to them...	50%

So how does talking often to parents affect violence? With young people who communicate with their parents more often, we find that they are less likely to:

- Be victims of teasing and rejecting, and having a body part pulled, twisted, squeezed, or pinched, as well as being victims of extreme violence**.
- Be aggressors of bullying*, physical violence**, and forcing people to do sexual acts**.

HALF of young people surveyed give their parents high marks for being "there for them"

Joy Osofsky, professor of public health and psychiatry at Louisiana State University Medical Center and author of a book that summarizes the research on children and violence, *Children in a Violent Society*, has found that the ways in which adults listen to children is also critical. She suggested that we explore the extent to which adults listen to children in ways that don't belittle, make fun of, or lecture them. She stressed the importance of adults being focused on their children when they are together.

Our own research has also indicated that focus is important so that, according to kids, they don't have to feel that reaching out to parents is like reaching out to people on a different planet: "Earth to Mom" or "Earth to Dad."

In fact, when we probe more deeply, by asking young people to assess[12] how well their parents communicate with them, we see that about half of young people surveyed give their parents high marks for being "there for them." Of particular note are the 28 to 38 percent who give their parents an *"A"* for knowing what is really going on in their lives (see Table 13). A full description of all of the grades given to mothers and fathers can be found in Appendix 1, Tables 35 and 36.

Table 13: Percentage of young people giving an "A" to mothers and fathers for...

	Mothers	Fathers
Listening to me without criticizing me or making fun of me in hurtful ways	60%	46%
Being really focused on me when I need [them] to pay attention to me	45%	44%
Knowing what is really going on in my life	38%	28%
Keeping promises and being people I can trust	59%	51%

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Again, we wanted to explore how the above relationship items are related to violence. We find:

- Children who grade their mothers with an "A" on these items are less likely to be victims on the majority of all types of violence*. Similariy, children who give their fathers high marks are also less likely to be victims of majority of violent acts*.

- Children giving their mothers and fathers higher marks are also less likely to be aggressors on the vast majority of behaviors*.

In sum, paying attention to, monitoring, and communicating well with children do matter in the lives of youth, and specifically in their experiences with violence. Those young people reporting that their parents do better jobs at these parenting skills are less likely to experience violence as either victims or aggressors.

Now we turn to the effect that encouraging children's interests have on violence.

2) Encouraging children's interests

Another parenting skill that is seen as important in preventing violence is encouraging children to have constructive interests and getting involved with kids.

Maria Guajardo Lucero, executive director of Assets for Colorado Youth, a Colorado-based youth organization, talked about a girl who has the following advice for adults: "Be curious about us. It's a fine line. We don't want you to be in our business. We don't want you to pry about everything we do. But we want you to be curious about who we are and what interests us and some of what we're doing and we'll tell you."

As Table 14 reveals, about half of mothers and fathers are given high marks for doing so.

paying attention to, monitoring, and communicating well with children DOES MATTER in the lives of youth, and specifically in their EXPERIENCES WITH VIOLENCE

Table 14: Percentage of young people giving an "A" to mothers and fathers for...

	Mothers	Fathers
Supporting my interests and getting involved in the things that interest me	54%	49%

We find that young people with more interested, involved mothers are:

- Less likely to be victims of emotional violence*, having a body part pulled, twisted, squeezed, or pinched**, as well as extreme violence**.
- Less likely to be aggressors in the majority of behaviors**.

Children who say their fathers are more interested and involved are:

- Less likely to be victims of teasing and rejecting**, physical*, and extreme violence**.
- Less likely to be aggressors on the majority of behaviors*.

Next, we address the effects of nurturing and developing constructive problem solving skills.

3) Helping children learn to solve problems constructively

Many young people acknowledged that they learn how to deal with conflict from their families. They talk about the example that parents set. As one writes:

> *I think the change needs to come from their families, like their mother and father. The reason that I am not very violent is because my parents raised me not to hit people. If I could change people's parents to teach children better, [I would].* - Girl, 17

The need for children to be able to solve problems emerged in our conversations with young people and experts alike. As one young man in one of our focus groups explained, kids need to have the breathing room to figure things out on their own, within reason of course. As he put it, "Parents—don't make your kids' choices [for them]. Don't let them off easy. If adults are really strict and keep you sheltered, then when I get away I'm afraid I'll make bad choices. We need to go through and learn how to make the correct choices now."

The experts we interviewed also suggested that we explore how parents teach their children to deal with conflict. Jim Garbarino, professor of human development at Cornell University, put it succinctly when he explained the difference between parents who give their children a life jacket and those who teach their children to swim. In other words, while some parents leave their children alone to deal with and handle conflict and fail to offer them advice or direction on how to do so, other parents are more involved in helping their children learn how to handle and interpret adversity.

Although approximately three in five mothers are seen positively by their children for promoting problem solving, less than or just about half of fathers are given high marks for these parenting skills (see Table 15).

Table 15: Percentage of young people giving an "A" to mothers and fathers for...

	Mothers	Fathers
Helping me figure out how to deal with my own problems in ways that don't hurt others	61%	43%
Giving me the help I need when I am in a tough spot	62%	51%

So are there statistical relationships between these parenting skills and violence? We find:

- Children who gave their mothers an "A" are less likely to be victims of the vast majority of violent behaviors*. They are also less likely to be aggressors of the vast majority of violent behaviors*.

- Likewise, children who give their fathers an "A" are less likely to be victims of the majority of violent behaviors*. While they are also less likely to be aggressors of many violent behaviors*, the relationship is not as strong as the one with victimization.

Several studies have found that young people learn how to control their aggression in part by how they are disciplined. So how do the parents of children in our study deal with disagreements with their children? A number of researchers, beginning with Judith Baumrind (1978), have differentiated parenting styles into three groups: authoritative (deciding together what would be best), authoritarian (forcing the child to do what the parent thinks is best), and permissive (giving into what the child wants). Studies typically found that an authoritative style is the most effective style of parenting (Maccoby and Martin, 1983).

The majority of young people in our study report that his or her parents use an authoritative discipline style rather than an authoritarian style or a permissive style. (See Table 16.)

Table 16: Percent of young people whose parents use various discipline styles

	Mothers	Fathers
Deciding together what would be best	64%	56%
Forcing me to do what he or she thinks is best	26%	31%
Giving in and letting me do whatever I want	9%	13%

Does discipline style, and specifically authoritative parenting, affect children's experiences with violence? We find:

- Children with authoritative mothers are not necessarily less likely to be victims of violence, but are less likely to be aggressors of emotional and physical violence**.

- Interestingly, children with authoritative fathers are less likely to be victims of some violence* but not necessarily less likely to be aggressors.

However, knowing the parents' discipline style is only half the story. Kids and parents can decide how to resolve a problem together and the interactions can be cool and collected or stormy. As Table 17 shows us, while a majority of mothers and just under half of fathers keep their cool and talk things through with their children, others lose it or are unpredictable.

kids and parents can DECIDE how to resolve a problem together and the interactions can be cool and collected or stormy

Table 17: Percentage of young people who report how their mother/father often or very often *reacts when there are disagreements*

	Mothers	Fathers
"Loses her/his temper"	17%	22%
"Is unpredictable-I never know how she/he will react"	19%	23%
"Keep her/his cool and we talk things through"	56%	48%

When we examine the statistical relationships between how parents handle conflicts and children's experiences with violence, we find that:

- Children who say their mothers keep their cool are less likely to be victims of all forms of violence** and less likely to be aggressors of the majority of violent acts*.

- Children who say their fathers keep their cool are also less likely to be victims of most violent behaviors* and less likely to reject and ignore others* and hit, shove, kick, or trip someone*.

Of course, this could be a chicken-egg situation. That is, children who are disciplined in a stormier fashion become

more violent, or children who provoke adults to lose their tempers are already more violent. In thinking about these relationships, it is always important to remember that adults do have responsibility for teaching children to control their feelings.

In sum, we can say that helping children solve problems constructively—particularly by mothers—also decreases the likelihood that they are aggressors.

FACTS ABOUT THE FINDINGS

- There are **no** differences in the overall grades[13] that young people give employed mothers versus stay-at-home mothers.
- There are **no** differences in the overall grades that young people give their mothers whether they are living in a single- or two-parent household.
- When we look at the overall grades children give their father, those fathers who are employed full-time receive the highest percentage of overall "A"s and the lowest percentage of "D"s and "F"s**. This could indicate that while a mother's parenting ability has no relation to her employment status, fathers' ability to parent may be linked to their employment status in children's eyes.

the kind of parenting children receive, based on virtually all of the ways we assess parenting, MAKES A DIFFERENCE in whether they are aggressors or victims of violence

4) Parenting matters

Put simply, our analysis reveal that the kind of parenting children receive, based on the majority of ways we assess parenting, makes a difference in whether they are aggressors or victims of violence. As the above section illustrates, those children who are more likely to report good relationships with their parents are generally less likely to be victims and aggressors.

Next, we explore the same relationship items for schools and teachers. To be able to make comparisons between home and school, we measure the effects that paying attention to, monitoring, and communicating well with children; encouraging children's interests; and helping children solve problems constructively at school have on children's experiences with violence.

RELATIONSHIPS AT SCHOOL

FINDING EIGHT: IMPROVE STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS—"NOT GETTING ENOUGH ATTENTION IS ONE REASON STUDENTS ARE VIOLENT"

Larry Aber, director of the National Center for Children in Poverty at Columbia University, noted that there is a "hidden curriculum in the classroom" and that this curriculum spells out the norms for how conflict is acknowledged and how it is dealt with.

Fundamental to this hidden curriculum are the relationships between students and teachers. Overall, 5 percent of young people write about improving schools. A number of them focus specifically on the role of the teacher:

> *I would have teachers be more involved at school. If the teachers can solve the problem before it becomes serious then there won't be a fight.* - Boy, 17

> *If I obtained the authority required, I would force teachers to be more interactive and make them responsible for the harassment in classrooms. There is a lot of teasing and harassment that teachers don't notice or they ignore and it needs to stop.* - Boy, 17

In addition, some talk about better communication between teachers, parents, and young people as a solution to help them learn and decrease the amount of violence they experience today.

> *I would make school a safe environment to be in. Safe meaning you would not be picked on and if you did the teachers would let your parents know. I feel teachers and elders should tell your parents if something is not going well for you.* - Girl, 14

> *Parent-teacher-pupil. Real education, communication between these three parts. Education is not a matter of just one or two, it takes three.* - Boy, no age given

One young person is blunt about how he feels about schools in general, and offers the following critique of the school system and the emphasis on sameness:

> *People spend eight to 12 hours a day at school. Half of our young life is in school. Why are you filling half of our life with negative unhelpful teachers and schools who don't care because they all get way underpaid? Why are you making schools so depressing? What's with all the stupid rules, codes, and laws? Why can't we have fun while we learn? Why do you teach students one way, when you know everyone looks different and acts differently? Why are we all forced to think one way? Why can't we be ourselves? Why have you tried to make us a system? If we think differently or learn differently you don't take the time to help. You as society and schools just fail us. Thanks a lot.* - Boy, 18

To probe the issue of the quality and impact of relationships with teachers, we asked young people many of the same questions about teachers that we asked about mothers and fathers.

1) Paying attention to, monitoring and communicating well with children

For more than half of students, feeling neglected at school happens *rarely* or *never*. However, 21 percent do feel invisible *often* or *very often* (see Table 18). This is slightly different than what we find nationally. Young people around the country are, in fact, less likely to feel that nobody notices them at school *often* or *very often* and more likely to say that this happens *never*. In other words, kids in Colorado feel less noticed in school than do kids around the country.

Table 18: Percentage of young people who feel that nobody notices them...

	At Home	At School
% feeling nobody notices them *never*	30%	25%^
% feeling that nobody notices them *rarely*	32%	29%^
% feeling that nobody notices them *sometimes*	22%	25%^
% feeling that nobody notices them *often*	11%	14%^
% feeling nobody notices them *very often*	6%	7%^

^indicates statistical differences between national and Colorado sample at .01

What is the statistical relationship between feeling noticed at school and violence? We find that:

- Children who feel less noticed at school are more likely to be victims of emotional violence and having a body part pulled, twisted, squeezed, or pinched**.
- However, children who feel less noticed at school do not appear to be acting out to get attention; they are only more likely to reject and ignore others*.

Although we didn't ask the same questions about monitoring and engagement with regard to teachers that we did of parents, we did probe several issues. Laurence Steinberg, professor of psychiatry at Temple University, who has interviewed troubled children and asked them what it would take to turn their lives around, suggested a number of issues we could explore. Other adults and young people suggested the importance of having adults outside of the families to whom kids could turn with a problem or an accomplishment.

As Table 19 illustrates, we find that three-quarters of young people (74%) say there are adults at school who

know their parents. Furthermore, just over half (52%) say that there are adults at school whom they would want to tell about something that has happened to them, and almost two-thirds (65%) report having adults who "are really there for me."

Table 19: Percentage of young people who say yes to having adults at their school who...

	Yes
Know who your parents are	74%
Are people you want to tell about something important that has happened to you	52%
Are really there for you	65%

We find that children who have adults at school who know their parents, who are people they want to tell important things to, and who are really there for them are:

- Less likely to commit and be on the receiving end of some violence, but enough of a pattern does not exist to make any broad generalizations about the link between adults at school and victimization and aggression.

We also find that 3 percent of young people say they talk to their teachers about what is important to them *very often*. Eight percent say they do this *often*. There is clearly a major difference between the half who communicate frequently with their parents and the 11 percent with teachers (see Table 20).

Table 20: Percentage of young people who talk often *or* very often *to...*

	Parents	Teachers
% talking *often* or *very often* about what is important to them	50%	11%

We find no clear connection between talking to teachers and violence.

Even though not very many young people report talking to their teachers regularly, young people rate teachers similar to fathers for listening in constructive ways (48% give teachers an "A" for listening) and 35 percent for focusing on them when they need attention. This latter figure is less than the 42 percent nationally who give their teachers an "A" on this.

Teachers, however, do not fare as well as well as parents when it comes to knowing what is going on in their students' lives (14% give their teachers an "A") and for keeping promises and being trustworthy (37% give teachers

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an "A"). While one might expect teachers not to know the details of their students' lives, it is surprising that only slightly more than one-third receive an "A" for being trustworthy. These findings are presented in Table 21. All of the grades given to teachers can be found in Appendix 1, Table 37.

Table 21: Percentage of young people giving an "A" for....

	Mothers	Fathers	Teachers
Listening to me without criticizing me or making fun of me in hurtful ways	60%	46%	48%
Being really focused on me when I need [them] to pay attention to me	45%	44%	35%^
Knowing what is really going on in my life	38%	28%	14%
Keeping promises and being people I can trust	59%	51%	37%

^indicates statistical differences between national and Colorado sample at .01

We find:

- Children who give their teachers higher marks on the above are less likely to be victims on most of the violent acts* and also less likely to be aggressors on the majority of acts.

Some kids suggest that the lack of connection between young people and kids is due to big schools. One girl from the national survey recommends:

> *I would make smaller schools where more attention could be paid to every student. I believe that not getting enough attention is one reason students are violent. Also, the teachers would be able to watch students more closely.* - Girl, 13

Again, we were not able to test the theory that one reason young people are disconnected from teachers is due to the size of the schools and classrooms. However, Colorado youth in classes that have 20 students or less on average are **no** more likely to give their teachers an average grade of an "A" than students in classes of over 20. There is also no relationship between the frequency of talking to teachers or feeling noticed and classroom size. This is different from the national finding, where young people in smaller classrooms are more likely to give their teachers an average grade of an "A," as well as talk to them and feel noticed more often.

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2) Encouraging children's interests

One might expect, and indeed hope, that teachers would be rated positively in connecting their teaching to kids' interests where appropriate.[14] By getting more involved with their students, teachers send the message that they respect young people and their input, and in turn, have the potential to keep students more involved and engaged in the learning process. However, only approximately one out of every four students (23%) gives his or her teachers an "A" for doing this (see Table 22).

Table 22: Percent of young people giving an "A" for...

	Mothers	Fathers	Teachers
Supporting my interests and getting involved in the things that interest me	54%	49%	23%

Despite the fact that many students seem not to be having learning experiences that build on or capture their interests, the vast majority (83%) do have an adult at school who cares about their performance. These differences point out something significant about learning today; perhaps there is a greater emphasis on performance than on helping children feel interested in what they are learning about (see Table 23).

Table 23: Percentage of young people who say yes to having an adult at their school who...

	Yes
Cares about how well you do	83%

In terms of encouraging children's interests and its effect on violence, our analysis find:

- Young people who give their teachers an "A" on supporting their interests are less likely to be rejected and forced to do sexual acts**. They are also less likely to commit emotional and physical violence**.
- There is no relationship between having adults at school who care about how well children do and experiences with violence.

3) Helping children learn to solve problems constructively

As Table 24 demonstrates, teachers fare better in helping young people solve problems (41% are given an "A") and giving them the help they need when they are in a tough situation (40% are given an "A").

Table 24: Percentage of young people giving an "A" for...

	Mothers	Fathers	Teachers
Helping me figure out how to deal with my own problems in ways that don't hurt others	61%	43%	41%
Giving me the help I need when I am in a tough spot	62%	51%	40%

Our analysis on the statistical links between helping children learn to solve problems constructively and violence find that:

- Children who give their teachers high marks on helping them figure out there own problems are less likely to be victims of many violent acts**, but there is a stronger relationship with aggression, as they are less likely to commit all violent acts except for bullying someone*.
- Children who grade their teachers well on helping them figure out how to deal with their problems are less likely to be victims or aggressors of some of the acts*.

school safety SHOULD BE more than increasing security and doling out harsher punishments

So what happens when kids fight? Do adults help out or do they look the other way? We find that most adults at school do not ignore fighting, but rather help kids solve their problems without resorting to violence.

- 73 percent of young people disagree *somewhat* or *strongly* with the statement "adults at my school usually ignore fighting among kids."
- 83 percent of young people agree *somewhat* or *strongly* with the statement "adults at my school help to find ways to solve problems without fighting."
- There is a sizeable minority, however—one in four—who agree (19% *somewhat* and 8% *strongly*) that adults at school usually ignore fighting among kids.

The full findings are available in Appendix 1, Table 42.

As one young person put it, school safety should be more than increasing security and doling out harsher punishments. Teachers and other administrators can do a lot to prevent violence:

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Teachers and staff in schools should enforce rules about simple things: dress code, profanity, violence, and disrespect. - Girl, 15

We also wanted to know how teachers react when they disagree with their students. More than half of students say that their teachers typically keep their cool, rather than losing their tempers or being unpredictable in their reactions. Teachers are less likely to lose their temper than are mothers or fathers and more likely than fathers to keep their cool and talk things through (see Table 25).

Table 25: Percentage of young people who say the following about when they disagree about something

	Mothers	Fathers	Teachers
% saying "They lose their temper" *often* or *very often*	17%	22%	11%
% saying "They are unpredictable—I never know how they will react" *often* or *very often*	19%	23%	24%
% saying "They keep their cool and we talk things through" *often* or *very often*	56%	48%	55%

In looking at the relationship between teachers' response to disagreements and violence, we find:—

- Children with teachers who are more likely to keep their cool are not necessarily less likely to be victims, but are less likely to be aggressors of emotional and physical violence*.

This implies that modeling could in fact be an important defense against violence. When young people see their teachers handling conflict in a controlled and responsible manner, they might be encouraged to do the same. Also, these teachers might very well be creating classroom environments where this type of problem-solving is the norm.

FACTS ABOUT THE FINDINGS

- We find no differences in the overall grades boys and girls give their teachers. Nationally, however, boys give their teachers higher marks than girls do: boys are more likely to give their teachers an "A" and less likely to give them a "D" or "F."
- Younger students (in fifth through eighth grades) report giving their teachers better overall grades than older students (in ninth though twelfth grades)**.
- Perhaps not surprisingly, young people who feel noticed at school and those who talk with their teachers more often are more likely to give their teachers good grades**.

4) Teaching matters

When we look at the effects of having teachers and others in the school pay attention to, monitor, and communicate well with children, we find that teachers matter, too. Those students with better relationships with their teachers and with other adults at school are less likely to be victims and aggressors with regard to several different forms of violence.

We now turn to look at the effects of friends and peer groups.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH FRIENDS

FINDING NINE: IMPROVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH FRIENDS FRIENDS ARE THE KEY TO LIFE

It is telling that when we asked young people what one change would stop violence, the largest proportion—35 percent—write about stopping the small things that lead to bigger problems with their peers. This includes 7 percent who are explicit about how important friends are in preventing violence:

> *Be nicer to everyone. Make more friends. You don't have to be best friends with them, just be nice to them. Let them know that you care.* - Girl, 15

> *That everyone would be friends with everyone.* - Boy, 11

Although it seems to be widely believed that friends are the ones who lead kids astray, there is another emerging view that relationships with friends can also be an important key to preventing violence. In his recent book *The Second Family* (2001), child and family therapist Ron Taffel argued that friendships have become "a second family." Though not a replacement for the first family (parents), the comfort and acceptance that kids seek in their friendships can be a force for good. As Taffel reminded us, friends and peer circles can, in fact, have a very positive influence on children.

When we looked at friend relationships, we asked kids many of the same questions we asked about parents and teachers.

relationships with friends can also be an important KEY TO PREVENTING VIOLENCE

1) Paying attention and communicating well with friends

It is clear that when it comes to communication, Ron Taffel's finding that children consider their friends a second family appears to hold true. A higher percentage of young people talk to their friends about what is important to them (55% do so *often* or *very often*) than their parents (50%) and especially their teachers (11%). This finding is presented in Table 26.

Table 26: Percentage of young people who talk often *or* very often *to...*

	Parents	Teachers	Friends
% talking *often* or *very often* about what is important to them	50%	11%	55%

But is talking to friends related to being less involved in violence? We find that there is actually no relationship between frequency of talking to friends and violence. Thus, it appears that friends have neither a strong positive or negative effect on rates of victimization or aggression.

Although Colorado young people talk more to their friends than their parents or teachers, and although they rate them more highly for knowing what is really going on in their lives, only 38 percent give their friends an "A" for listening without being critical or teasing in a hurtful way. Similarly, only 35 percent give them an "A" for being really focused on them. This is less than the percentage of young people nationally who give their friends an "A" for being focused on them. Table 27 shows that friends are on par with parents and teachers when it comes to paying full attention, but are seen more positively than teachers and fathers for keeping promises and being trustworthy. See Appendix 1, Table 38 for all of the grades given to friends.

Table 27: Percentage of young people giving an "A" for...

	Mothers	Fathers	Teachers	Friends
Listening to me without criticizing me or making fun of me in hurtful ways	60%	46%	48%	38%
Being really focused on me when I need [them] to pay attention to me	45%	44%	35%^	35%^
Knowing what is really going on in my life	38%	28%	14%	39%
Keeping promises and being people I can trust	59%	51%	37%	54%

^indicates statistical differences between national and Colorado sample at .01

We find:

- Children who gave their friends high marks are less likely to be victims** and aggressors* of a number of violence behaviors.

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2) Encouraging children's interests

Mothers, fathers, and friends are seen the most positively for supporting the interests of young people—much more so than teachers (see Table 28).

Table 28: Percent of young people giving an "A" for...

	Mothers	Fathers	Teachers	Friends
Supporting my interests and getting involved in the things that interest me	54%	49%	23%	42%

In our analysis of the links between having friends who encourage young people's interests and violence, we find:

- Children who give their friends high marks on supporting their interests are less likely to be on the receiving end of teasing and rejecting**, as well as getting attacked with a weapon*.
- These children are also less likely to tease, bully, reject, and attack others with a weapon*.

3) Helping children learn to solve problems constructively

The picture that emerges from looking at friendship relationships is that friends are supportive but they do less well as role models for offering alternatives to solving problems constructively. Only 38 percent are given an "A" for doing so (see Table 29).

Table 29: Percent of young people giving an "A" for...

	Mothers	Fathers	Teachers	Friends
Helping me figure out how to deal with my own problems in ways that don't hurt others	61%	43%	41%	38%
Giving me the help I need when I am in a tough situation	62%	51%	40%	49%

Our analysis of the links between friends who help kids with problem solving and violence find that:

- It appears that having friends who help them figure out their problems in ways that do not hurt others pays off; children who give their friends an "A" on this are less likely to be on the receiving end of all violence**,

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as well as commit all forms of violence except force someone to do sexual acts*.

- Having friends who give help in a tough spot is related to violence, but the link is weaker than the one with helping them figure out problems in ways that don't hurt others; although those who give their friends an "A" on this are less likely to reject*, hit, shove, kick, or trip**, and attack someone with a weapon**.

We also wanted to know to what extent children lead other children astray.

Laurence Steinberg, professor of psychiatry at Temple University, noted that the public has an over-sensationalized view of youth violence in general, and of peer pressure specifically. Research has suggested that rather than being led astray by other kids, kids seek out friends who are involved in what they want to do. He suggested that we explore this issue and try to obtain a more nuanced view of peer pressure.

We asked young people to tell us what generally happens when they hang out with their friends. We find:

- 44 percent of young people say that they *rarely* or *never* do things that could get them into trouble when they hang out with their friends.
- 45 percent say that they *sometimes* do things that could get them into trouble when they are hanging out with their friends.
- Only 10 percent of young people report that they *usually* do things that could get them into trouble when they are hanging out with their friends.

young people who rate their friends more highly are the least likely to frequently do things that will GET THEM INTO TROUBLE

Young people who rate their friends more highly are the least likely to frequently do things that will get them into trouble when they hang out with them, and young people with the worst relationships with their friends are much more likely to report usually doing things that could get them into trouble**.

In another question, we asked young people to tell us what happens when their friends or other people their age put pressure on them to do things that they do not want to do. We find that most say they stand up to their friends (63%) or figure out ways to get around peer pressure (29%):

- Only 8 percent of young people say that, when other people their age put pressure on them to do something they don't want to do, *"For the most part I do what they want me to do."*
- 29 percent say that *"I try to figure out ways to get around what they want me to do so I don't have to do it."*
- The majority of young people (63%) say *"I stand up to them for what I want to do."*

These findings suggest that assumptions about the activities of young people and their susceptibility to peer pressure might be over-rated. However, it is hard to know how to interpret the finding that one in three kids figures out ways to get around their friends when they are pressured—is that positive or negative? It's also important to note that more than one in 10 young people are *usually* doing things with their friends that could get them into trouble and that 7 percent are at risk most of the time from peer pressure.

FACTS ABOUT THE FINDINGS

- Girls give their friends better overall grades than boys do**.
- There is no difference in how younger and older students grade their friends. Nationally, older students (ninth through twelfth grades) rate their friends more highly than do younger students (fifth through eighth grades).
- There is also no relationship between the grades young people give their friends and the likelihood that a young person will stand up to their friends in the face of peer pressure. In the national sample, we find that young people who rate their friends more highly are more likely to stand up to them when being pressured to do something that they do not want to do.

4) Friends matter

Young people's relationships with their friends also affects rates of victimization and aggression. Overall, we find that the relationship between young people and their parents, teachers, and friends all make a difference.

THE OVERALL CULTURE

FINDING TEN IMPROVE THE CULTURE I WANT MORE THAN ANYTHING TO SEE PEACE IN THIS WORLD

It goes without saying that the larger culture has a direct and indirect impact on youth violence, as it influences the adults who take care of and teach them and the images and sights they grow up with. Thirteen percent of young people say that to stop violence, the culture needs to change—and to do so, they call for ending war, for peace and more religion, for ending media violence, substance abuse, gangs and sexual harassment, for making bad people good, and for reducing the pressured world they live in. Specifically, we address stress; perceived family economic health; drugs; violence in the larger culture; and community improvement.

to stop violence, the CULTURE NEEDS TO CHANGE

Stress

Esperansa Zachman, program director of the Tony Grampsas Youth Services Program in Colorado, suggested that we investigate stress in this study "because so many children and families are dealing with the stress and complexity of life today." Our own research on the children of employed parents (Galinsky, 2000) concurs. The young people we talked with in focus groups also mentioned stress as a potential catalyst for violence. Some described a numbness; a sense of being overwhelmed; a "what's the difference anyway" attitude; and hair-trigger responses to feeling rushed and stressed.

To address this issue, we asked two analytic questions about stress.

Our first analytic question was: Would kids with more stressed **teachers** or **parents** have poorer relationships with these adults? Would they be more likely to experience violence?

As Table 30 illustrates, more than one in four young people (28%) reports that his or her teachers are stressed *often* or *very often*, while almost two in five (39%) young people say the same about their parents.

Table 30: Percentage of young people who think that the following persons are stressed often *or* very often

	Teachers	Parents	Themselves
% who feel stressed *often* or *very often*	28%	39%	42%^

^indicates statistical differences between national and Colorado sample at .01

We find:

- Children with **parents** who are stressed are more likely to be victims of some emotional violence and physical violence**, as well as being attacked with a weapon**. They are also more likely than children with less stressed parents to commit all violent activities except for forcing someone to do sexual acts**.

- Children with **teachers** who are stressed are more likely to be victims of everything** except being forced to do sexual acts. Teacher stress is more strongly linked to children's experiences in inflicting violence, however. Young people with teachers who are more stressed are more likely to hurt others emotionally and physically**. Some of these children might view teachers who are stressed as less equipped to be on guard for classroom problems. Or, perhaps teachers are more stressed because there are more behavior problems in their classrooms.

Children in Colorado are slightly more likely to feel stressed than are children around the country (42% versus 35%), but they are no more likely to report that their teachers or parents are stressed.

Our second question was: Are **young people** who are stressed more likely to experience violence, as this student conjectures? About two in five (42%) kids say that they are stressed frequently.

Make life less stressful. - Boy, 16

One young woman speaks about helping kids handle their stress better:

I would have to say that some of the anxieties should be let up [on] teenagers. We are under a lot of stress and if someone pushes us too far we will snap. Our generation is one of short fuses and long grudges. We should shorten those grudges and elongate the fuses so we can handle things like mature young adults. - Girl, 17

We find that:

- Perhaps not surprisingly, **young people** who are more stressed are more likely to be victims of all violence except for bullying and being forced to do sexual acts**. A similar relationship emerges in regard to committing violence; those individuals who report being more stressed are more likely to perpetrate all forms of violence except for forcing someone else to do sexual acts*.

One student puts it very well when she writes:

I would have to say I would try and stop putting pressure on kids. Because most of that pressure can lead to violence. - Girl, 13

Perceived family economic health

Several young people see money problems connected to violence. To stop violence they would "give the poor jobs," or "give money to poor people." As one girl suggests:

I could make a place that would have a lot of jobs so the people can work and get money to live on. - Girl, 15

The measure we use to find out the economic health of the child's family asks the child to self-assess his or her family's economic situation.

Overall, 9 percent of children report that their families have a hard time buying the things they need; 27 percent have just enough money for the things they need; 51 percent have no problem buying the things they need and sometimes they can also buy special things; and 13 percent have enough money to buy pretty much anything they want.

These items clearly assess the children's **perceptions**, not the families' actual financial situation. Families can have less money than they convey to their children. Conversely, families can be wealthy and yet portray economic neediness to their kids.

Are young people who report that their families are not in as good economic health more likely to experience violence? We find:

- Young people who say that their families have a hard time buying the things they need are more likely than other young people to be victims of all forms of violence except for being bullied**.

- Young people who say their families have a hard time buying the things they need are not necessarily more likely to commit violence; however, they are more likely to pull, twist, squeeze, or pinch a part of someone's body* and attack others with a weapon**.

Drugs/Alcohol

Although we did not specifically ask young people about drug or alcohol use, 3 percent see this as a key to stopping violence:

> *Most of the violence comes from people drunk or high or on some kind of drug. So I would say that there would be no drugs.* - Girl, 11

> *The change that I would make would probably be to get rid of all the drugs in the world. Drugs seem to cause a lot of violence to me.* - Girl, 12

Violence in the larger culture

Three percent of young people call for curbing the violence in the mass media—on television, including entertainment programs, the news, and in commercials, in sports, in the movies, in video games, and in music. Many are very strong in their disapproval, calling for adults to "stop feeding" kids violence in the media.

> *My change would be to stop violence in movies, on TV, or anywhere. Kids get violent when they see something violent on TV or whatever and they think it's cool. I think that's just plain wrong.* - Girl, 11

> *One thing I would do would be to eliminate TV violence because even though people say that it doesn't make a difference it really does.* - Girl, 16

Two percent suggest faith-based solutions to stop violence:

> *Take them all to church and help them in their lives.* - Girl, 14

Improving communities, providing positive activities for youth

Many of the experts we interviewed stressed the necessity of a holistic view of violence prevention. Sandy Newman, president of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, said, "One of the most powerful strategies to prevent violence is to provide young people with constructive activities and caring adult supervision after school, on weekends and during the summers. Appropriate options vary with children's ages and interests, but include both formal after-school programs, youth clubs with adult sponsors, opportunities to contribute to the community, and school-

based extracurricular activities ranging from intramural sports to school newspapers to debate clubs." Many young people share this viewpoint.

Put more people in after-school activities, sports, jobs, or extracurricular activities. - Girl, 15

Others talk about offering creative or other outlets for children, not only to deal with anger, but also to create a better sense of community:

To have some kind of boxing or a sport which helps you with violence. Teaching anger management also so a person knows how they are going to react. - Girl, 17

I would say to integrate the arts. The arts help students integrate with others (who they probably wouldn't have associated with in the first place) and it gets students to learn more about themselves. - Girl, 17

the importance of community as a VIOLENCE PREVENTION STRATEGY includes—but extends far beyond—the provision of constructive activities for kids

The importance of community as a violence prevention strategy includes—but extends far beyond—the provision of constructive activities for kids. Sandy Newman and the police chiefs, sheriffs, district attorneys and victims of violence who make up Fight Crime: Invest in Kids emphasized that violence prevention begins before children even start kindergarten. They noted that high quality educational child care programs for preschool children have been rigorously proven effective in greatly reducing subsequent crime and violence. As then-Winston Salem Police Chief George Sweat put it: "Our fight against crime needs to start in the high chair, not the electric chair."

Another key community factor is the sense of responsibility that adults have—or don't have—for the well-being of other people's children. Tony Earls, professor of human behavior at the Harvard School of Public Health, called this "collective efficacy." It means that neighbors are willing to do something to ensure the "common good" of their neighborhood, and share a sense of responsibility for how children in their neighborhood behave. In a study of more than 8,000 residents of 343 neighborhoods in Chicago, Earls and his colleagues found that in neighborhoods where the sense of "collective efficacy" is higher, there is less violence. This held true in neighborhoods where there is poverty, joblessness, and other factors typically associated with violence.

One young person from the national sample says it simply:

I would try to make everyone in a community get along. - Boy, 12

A youth in Colorado goes farther to suggest actual community-based programs:

I would put more community centers in neighborhoods to help kids do something to release their energy. - Girl, 17

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY A LOT OF IT IS THE KIDS

From our national survey:

> *I don't want to sound phony or ditzy, but I think a lot of it is the kids. They can blame it on parents or the school or other kids; however I think the kids know what they're doing and can probably control themselves. They may have been bullied and punked around but high school's only four years—deal with it.* - Girl, 15

Others echo this girl's opinion, not by pushing the responsibility on others to "deal," but by taking responsibility for how they—**themselves**—can prevent violence:

> *I would be a good influence and not do it at anytime.* - Boy, 10

> *Change my attitude toward life and other situations.* - Girl, 14

young people say they need to take responsibility for how they—THEMSELVES—can prevent violence

In addition, a young woman from a North Carolina focus group explained that by being a bystander to emotional and physical violence, one is actually promoting a culture that accepts such behavior. In her words, "Part of it is that even if you are not the perpetrator or the one doing the picking, that if you see someone else is being picked on it is more comfortable for you to ignore and not do anything about it. There are those who don't think they're doing anything, but even if you don't agree with it you're not doing anything to stop it."

According to Sarah Ingersoll, executive director of the National Campaign Against Youth Violence, making change involves countering some of the myths that kids themselves hold. For example, in a review of polling data on violence that her organization commissioned, she noted that most kids do not want to fight—but think that other kids expect them to do so. They don't really know that most kids feel as they do. This reinforces the notion that we have written about earlier in the report—young people both need and want appropriate adult help in taking greater responsibility.

FINDING ELEVEN: COPING SKILLS MATTER

While none of the facets of personal responsibility mentioned here are solely the responsibility of the individual (they develop from how the child is raised and taught), they are characteristics that could be promoted by families, teachers, and community leaders. We think of them as learned coping skills.

How young people interpret others' motives

Studies have found that how children interpret the actions of others is related to whether or not they strike back.

For example, if one child pushes another—is it automatically seen as an act of aggression or as an accident? And therefore, is this action worthy of forgiveness or of revenge?

Pam Cantor, a psychiatrist with expertise in youth violence and the president of Children's Mental Health Alliance Foundation said, "Scientists now know that the healthy developing brain of children is wired to grow in response to the (hopefully) healthy relationships surrounding it. We know that the capacity for violence grows in the absence of empathy for others and the absence of an ability to see the humanity of others."

children's previous experiences with violence increase the probability that they will VIEW AMBIGUOUS SITUATIONS AS HOSTILE

Larry Aber, director of the National Center for Children in Poverty at Columbia University and a well-known researcher on adolescents and violence, reported that "so much about violence and conflict has to do with what goes on in kids' heads: Children who have a bias toward interpreting ambiguous action as having a hostile intent are much more likely to resort to aggression."

We took some of the measures that researchers have used to assess these biases and adapted them for older children. We wanted to understand how young people react to an ambiguous but potentially inflammatory situation. So we asked them to respond to a scenario where they are eating lunch with their friends at school. All of a sudden, they feel a drink being spilled all over their back. They look up and see a student they don't know very well standing behind them. We asked them what their immediate reaction to this event would be. We find:

- 56 percent of young people say they would think the drink spilling was done *on purpose*.
- 44 percent say they would think that the event occurred *by accident*.

More young people in Colorado think that the drink spilling was done *on purpose* (48% nationally thought this compared with 56% in Colorado). However, our study cannot determine why this particular instance might be the case. This finding is intriguing—one we are not sure how to explain.

This means that more than half of Colorado young people are ready to see ambiguous events that happen to them as inflammatory—a sign that they may not be taking other people's point of view into account. To spontaneously attribute an ambiguous action as being "on purpose" is clearly a sign that some kids may be growing up without being able to separate benign action from hostile intent.

To further probe their reactions, we asked the students in this study if they would accept an apology from the student if they believed that the apology was sincere. Most students (77%) agree that they would accept the apology if they thought it was sincere. However, almost a quarter (23%) of young people would not accept the apology and try to get back at that person in some way.

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Not surprisingly, those students who think that the drink was poured *on purpose* are much less likely to accept an apology**.

Are students who see harmful intent in this situation more likely to experience violence? Consistent with what other researchers' findings, our analysis reveal that:

- Those students who believed this theoretical event was a hostile one were more likely to have been teased or gossiped about and been on the receiving end of physical violence**. They are also more likely to be rejected and ignored*.

- Students who believed this event was hostile were also more likely to inflict emotional violence** and hit, shove, kick, or trip someone*.

In short, children's previous experiences with violence increases the probability that they will view ambiguous situations as hostile, which in turn increases the probability that they will respond violently.

How much control young people feel they have about their future

In designing this study, we spoke to several youth leaders who are working with young people in violence prevention programs. In our interviews, we asked them what they had learned. One important lesson struck us. These leaders reported that many of the kids they work with are very cynical about life. Youth also fail to see the connections between their actions and the consequences of that action.

William Morales, who runs programs at the Egleston Square Youth Center in Boston, encourages the young people he works with to realize that they do have control over their future and to recognize the present and future consequences of the choices they make. He tries to help them see that working on small things can lead to overall success, "I tell them a lot of my success came from the small steps. We try to teach them to look back three months ago and see where they have come from—try to make them think about the long term and where their behavior is coming from." In particular, he organizes baseball games with the young people and uses this game as a metaphor for life: "Things on the field have lessons for what happens off the field. When you strike out, that is an embarrassing thing, how do you deal with embarrassment?"

Marqueece Harris-Dawson, who works with young people in an innovative program in South Central Los Angeles, described how important it is to teach kids how to analyze situations before they act, to try to figure how the consequences of various responses, and then to identify the most effective solutions. This is another example of teaching children that they can and do have some control over what happens to them.

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And so we asked young people what they felt about the future—whether or not they feel they can reach their goals if they work hard enough or whether they feel that it doesn't matter what they do—"whatever happens will happen anyway." Our findings are presented in Table 31. Please see Appendix 1, Table 39, for the full findings.

We combined these two items to construct a scale[15] of overall levels of feelings of control over one's future. We find:

- 16 percent of young people report *high* feelings of control
- 46 percent of young people report *middle* levels of control
- 37 percent of young people report *low* levels of control.

Table 31: Percentage of young people who strongly agree *with the following statements that measure their feelings of control over their future*

	% of ALL young people who *strongly agree*
I can reach my goals if I just work hard enough	72%
I feel like it doesn't matter what I do—whatever happens will happen anyway	26%

Overall, we find that there are no differences between boys and girls with regard to feelings of control over their future. There was also no difference between younger students (in the fifth through eighth grades) and older students (those in the ninth through twelfth grades).

We wondered if kids who feel more in control of their future are less likely to experience violence.

We find:

- Young people with less feelings of control about their future are more likely to pull, twist, squeeze, or pinch someone and commit extreme violence**.
- Those individuals with less feelings of control are also more likely to be victims of hitting, shoving, kicking, and tripping, as well as extreme violence**.

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3) How much self-esteem young people have

Young people talk about the importance of self-esteem and self-confidence, noting that low self-esteem can be a catalyst for violent activity. To stop violence, they say:

When people have good self-esteem they are less violent. So don't poke fun at anybody. - Girl, 14

Likewise, Joy Osofsky, professor of public health and psychiatry at Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center, finds that young people who resort to violence "usually feel really badly about themselves." She urged us to include questions about children's self-esteem in this study.

To do so, we adapted a scale that Susan Harter at the University of Denver has used in her research on self-esteem among school-aged children. We included questions that asked about their feelings about their intelligence compared to that of their peers; how easy it is for them to make friends; how happy they are with their physical appearance; and how happy in general they are with themselves. We then combined these findings into a self-esteem scale.[16] Table 32 explores our findings in greater detail. Again, full findings are available in Table 39 in the appendix. We find that:

- 37 percent of young people appear to have *high* self-esteem;
- 40 percent appear to have *middle* levels of self-esteem; and
- 23 percent appear to have *low* levels of self-esteem.

Table 32: Percentage of young people who strongly agree *with the following statements that measure their levels of self-esteem*

	% of ALL young people who *strongly agree*
I feel like I am just as smart or smarter than people my age	35%
I have an easy time making friends	44%
I am pretty happy with the way I look	43%
I am generally happy with myself as a person	51%

Girls are more likely than boys to exhibit low levels of self-esteem*. In addition, younger students (in the fifth through eighth grades) have higher levels of self-esteem than do their older counterparts (in the ninth through twelfth grades)**.

We wondered if young people with higher self-esteem are, in fact, less prone to violence. We find that:

there is a connection between SELF-ESTEEM AND VIOLENCE

- Young people with higher levels of self-esteem are less likely to have been victims AND aggressors of every single violent behavior: emotional, physical, and extreme**.

The finding that Colorado young people with low levels of self-esteem are much more likely to be victims and aggressors is extremely important, and represents a more significant connection between esteem and violence than we find nationally.

SUMMARY

FINDING TWELVE: KIDS NEED GOOD RELATIONSHIPS IN ALL ASPECTS OF THEIR LIVES

We have already examined whether the quality of relationships with mothers, fathers, friends, and teachers is statistically linked with violent behavior. However, the large number of findings from these analysis, in which we compared answers to single questions about relationships with single questions about violent behavior, makes it difficult to reach general conclusions that might be useful to decisionmakers. To facilitate interpretation of findings we conducted additional analysis that allow us to evaluate groups of relationship questions as predictors of violent behavior.[17]

First, we assessed the *overall* association between the quality of parental relationships—all aspects of both maternal and paternal relationships—and each type of emotional, physical, and extreme violence examined in the study. We find:

- More positive parental relationships are associated with significantly lower levels of victimization and aggression of all types of emotional, physical, and extreme violence.

Second, we evaluated whether the overall quality of relationships with friends predicts the incidence of victimization and violent behavior. We find:

- More positive relationships with friends are associated with significantly lower levels of all types of victimization and all but one type of aggression—forcing others to do sexual acts.

Third, we assessed whether the overall quality of relationships with teachers makes a positive difference. We find:

- More positive relationships with teachers are significantly associated with significantly lower levels of all forms of victimization and aggressive behavior.

Although this study cannot establish cause and effect with confidence, the overall pattern of association between the incidence of victimization and violent behavior and the quality of social relationships is very compelling. There is considerable evidence from other studies that indicates that strong and positive support from other people is

THE WORDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE call on us, the adults, to take action not just to address acts of violence once they have occurred but to PREVENT them from ever happening in the first place

important to the development of well-adjusted, resilient children. This pattern of findings for Colorado is quite similar to our national findings. From a policy perspective, our findings suggest that initiatives to improve children's relationships with parents, friends, and teachers might serve to reduce the incidence of both violent behavior and victimization. For instance, it is conceivable that school-based initiatives focused on teacher-child relationship building might have an independent, positive effect in reducing violent behavior among pre-teens and teens.

In sum, we find that all three kinds of relationships matter. Positive support from important people in kids' lives is a defining quality of a civil society. Children who live in a more civil society with more support are less likely to be both victims of violence and aggressors. These findings clearly echo what children themselves are calling for.

Additionally, while a few differences emerge between the Colorado and national sample, not enough of a pattern develops for us to confidently make generalizations. The most striking findings are that school principals in Colorado are more likely to report serious violent incidents (but that children are not necessarily more likely to report **experiencing** them than they are around the country), and that children in Colorado in fact feel safer at school. Both findings suggest that increased awareness in the state, which may translate into better programs or policies within the school and other measures that make children feel more secure, has increased feelings of safety.

The words of young people call on us, the adults, to take action not just to address acts of violence once they have occurred, but to prevent them from ever happening in the first place. We need to move beyond looking for blame to focusing on solutions. There is too much violence and not enough respect in the lives of young people today. Students call for a more civil society, including help with preventing and resolving conflict and accepting, in fact celebrating, diversity.

We held additional focus groups with young people after the study was completed as we produced the accompanying videos. We asked these young people the same questions:

"If you could make <u>one</u> change that would help stop the violence that young people experience today, what would that change be?"

Again and again, just as in the study, these young people called on adults to help break the culture of stereotyping that begins early and can feel inescapable—the teasing, the "dissing," the shunning.

They said that this emotional violence often takes place below the radar screen of adults. Adults don't notice because they are more attuned to the kind of violence they see on TV or read about in the media. Or if they do

notice, they brush it aside with: "Kids will be kids." Or "Words can't hurt you." But, "They can hurt," the young people said. "They do hurt." So rather than be hurt, some kids act badly toward others to protect themselves.

One young person spoke for many when he said, "Let us grow up comfortable with being ourselves."

The findings of the analysis we have conducted and the options for ending violence posed by young people point us toward many solutions. Young people say they want help. We can and must respond.

ACTION STEPS TO END VIOLENCE

> *There is a mismatch between the enormous amount of concern we show when terrible things happen and the amount of resources we bring to bear on these problems.*
>
> Steven Marans, Ph.D., Harris Associate Professor of Child Psychoanalysis at Yale University and director of the National Center for Children Exposed to Violence.

> *We must join together in the strongest possible commitment to finding solutions to youth violence.*
>
> Pam Cantor, M.D., president, Children's Mental Health Alliance Foundation

As authors of this study, we recommend the following action steps be considered.

1) Help to establish norms where differences are not put down but are celebrated

Helping children to celebrate differences and embrace diversity should be at the heart of every strategy we recommend. We strongly believe that it is key to creating a more civil society and promoting peace and understanding. In homes, schools, and neighborhoods, in our community meeting places and religious organizations, we should help children learn to understand our common humanity and to celebrate and value diversity.

Teaching children to celebrate our diversity does involve helping them see the commonalities in people beneath surface appearances—in how we look, where we live, what we wear, what we like to do.

It also entails teaching them to appreciate and respect differences. As young people write, celebrating diversity is much more than combating racism. It includes combating classism and all of the other "isms" where we promote one right way to be "in." In the words of one of the young people in this study, **"It needs to end."** And in the words of another, "Let us grow up comfortable with being ourselves."

Good programs that address the everyday social stressors of young people—fitting in, cliques, etc.—can help mitigate the effects of the "isms" and promote a better understanding of difference and diversity. Furthermore, programs that encourage young people to break down these barriers by facilitating conversations about everyday issues and the root causes of these problems that are catalysts for violence can be extremely effective.

2) Work toward the creation of a civil society where there is more caring and respect

A 2002 study by Public Agenda, *Aggravating Circumstances*, finds that adults seem to worry as much about civility as young people. For example, almost eight in 10 (79%) of adults say lack of respect and courtesy is a serious problem in our society and one that we should address. In addition, 73 percent believe that Americans used to treat each other with more respect and courtesy in the past.

When there are problems in society, we usually look for someone or something to blame. In the Public Agenda study, many adults say that they **themselves** are not as civil as they would like to be—they see the causes as residing in the rushed, stressed lives so many people live today. Yet the more civil behavior exhibited in the wake of September 11 reveals that such change is not only possible but it improves the quality of life for us all.

Perhaps hearing how this lack of civility is profoundly affecting young people will be a further societal call to action.

What does it mean to be more civil? In the end, one aspect of civility involves small everyday acts of supporting each other. As one child said in a focus group, it is as simple as remembering to smile, to ask about each other, and have empathetic responses to the frustrations of traffic, work, lines in stores, and each other.

As we examine the literature on child development, one particular finding stands out. Children who feel known, understood, listened to, and respected behave this way in turn. Children who are treated this way are less likely to see ambiguous acts as hostile in intent. Self-esteem is not simply a matter of heaping praise on children—it is treating them with empathy, care, respect, and understanding. This, to us, is a major building block of a more civil society with children and among adults.

3) Improve the relationships that children have in all aspects of their lives—at home and at school.

The results of our study show clearly that good relationships can be a defense against violence among young people. Good relationships are clearly part of a more civil society. According to our findings, to ensure good relationships, adults should:

Pay attention to children. It is unfortunate that 16 percent of young people feel seemingly invisible at home and in school.

- **Parents** should set aside regular and predictable times to be with each of their children. Other work of the Families and Work Institute indicates that this time should include moments where parents are really focused on their children as well as basic "hang-around time," where the family is together, not rushed, and not in

planned activities. For highly stressed parents, even ten minutes can be the child's special time—this special time can make a big difference. Joy Osofsky, professor of public health and psychiatry at Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center, notes that if parents find the time with their children reinforcing and pleasurable, they tend to find ways to increase this time.

- **Teachers** should make an effort to get to know all of the children in their classes. **Schools** and **communities** should invest in reforms that make this possible, such as smaller schools, schools within schools, smaller classrooms, better student-teacher ratios, and more counselors. They should also encourage children and teachers to expand their interaction, so that teachers and students can get to know each other outside of the classroom. Events out of the school, extracurricular activities, and other activities that create "hang-around time" for students and teachers or other adults at the school should be encouraged. Schools could even explore ways to build this into the school day. Unfortunately, there is sometimes not enough time for a student to speak with a teacher after class and still make it to his or her next class. If opportunities exist for teachers and students to chat during the day in a more informal setting, they might be more inclined to do so.

Monitor what is going on with kids. Approximately one in five young people report that his or her parents don't know who most of his or her friends are or what he or she is doing during out-of-school time.

- **Parents** should make every effort not only to know what is going on with their kids, but to get engaged in their kids' lives.

High percentages of young people report that they have no adults at school who are there for them or who know their parents. Close to one in two says he or she has no adults at school to talk to when something important happens. **Schools** should establish a mentor program, whereby one adult is matched with each child. That adult's role is to get to know and mentor the young person. The mentor could be someone from the school, a volunteer community program, or a local business.

Create open channels of communication with young people. Only 50 percent of young people report talking *very often* or *often* with their parents about what is important to them; 11 percent says the same about teachers. One young person says, "It is easier for me to get adults to give me money than to give me time." Communication involves listening without being hurtful. It involves being focused on kids, knowing what is going on in their lives, keeping promises and being trustworthy. While most adults know that we should behave this way (and that we ourselves would like others to communicate with us in this fashion), the heat of the moment can erode the best intentions.

Communication skills are skills that parents and teachers can learn in parent support groups and in teacher education programs. And these skills, like all skills, need reinforcement.

- **Communities** need to make groups that are truly supportive and available for parents of pre-teens and teens. These programs should help families develop and maintain good communication skills.

- **Communities** should also establish youth centers where young people gain leadership skills, can express themselves in a variety of ways, and are listened to with respect.

- **Parents** should not be hesitant in seeking support from others, and particularly from those people whom they personally admire. Everyone needs someone in their lives who will make them laugh and calm them down when they are burned out or ready to lash out at their kids. Parents can take their own "time out" and get support in being better communicators themselves.

- **Parents** should also set aside a special time just for talking, such as a family meeting or going out to breakfast together on the weekend.

- **Teacher education programs** and **teacher in-service training** should include teaching communication skills.

- **Schools** should work on improving student-teacher communication. For example, they can designate a staff person who has excellent communication skills as a support person to other teachers who are struggling with how to communicate with the kids in their class. Staff meetings can also involve discussions of communication problems and the brainstorming of solutions.

Encourage children's interests. About half of the young people in our survey give their mothers and fathers an "A" for supporting their interests and getting involved in the things that interest them; only about one in four gives teachers an "A" for this skill. When we asked kids what differentiates young people who get into trouble from those who do not, we have heard that kids with outside interests are more immune to getting into trouble. Of course, other things matter as well, but we think it is important for every young person to have something that really interests him or her.

- For **parents**, it is important to see what captures their children and then build on those interests—whether the interests are understanding science, being in a rock band, skateboarding, or working in a community kitchen to feed the homeless.

- **Teachers,** too, should set aside some part of every week to give young people experiences that engage them. Often these interests are promoted through service-learning projects or through youth leadership programs.

Help children learn to solve problems constructively. In terms of parents, 61 percent of young people give their mothers an "A" for helping them figure out how to deal with their own problems in ways that don't hurt others; 43 percent give fathers an "A" and 41 percent give teachers an "A" for this same skill. Excellent communication skills and discipline techniques can be learned, and they typically need support to be maintained.

- **Support groups for parents** of pre-teens and teens should include teaching discipline skills and problem-solving exercises.

- **Teacher education programs and in-service programs** should teach and reinforce discipline skills for teachers, including teachers of older kids.

- For **parents** and **teachers**, it is important to discipline young people in ways that will help them learn coping skills. In helping children deal with problems, adults should remember that the word discipline comes from a Latin word meaning "learn." Discipline also involves how adults handle their own aggressive feelings, whether adults keep their cool (about one in two parents and teachers do) or blow up.

4) Include young people's views of how to end violence in violence prevention efforts.

We need to include young people in framing solutions. As the children say, "If we are PART OF THE PROBLEM, then we need to be PART OF THE SOLUTION." We agree with Tony Earls, professor of human behavior at the Harvard School of Public Health, who said that this strategy is fundamental to preventing and resolving issues of youth violence. This point cannot be driven home strongly enough. Young people NEED to be included in the process of stopping violence. As we have seen throughout this report, they offer insightful suggestions and remedies, and asking and incorporating young people's opinions invests them in the process of carrying out the solutions.

For this to work, the community involved really has to be committed to listening. It would be hypocritical to include young people and then not heed anything they have to say. The involvement of young people better ensures that the solutions created will be accepted and acted upon.

- **Form a leadership group of young people who can represent the issues young people feel strongly about.** They can be elected, appointed, and/or self-selected. They can be stand-alone or a part of youth organizing or leadership efforts.

- **Create opportunities for the group to learn about the complexity of the issues**. This education phase is important so that the input from young people is founded on fact and knowledge. Groups can use the results of the *Youth and Violence* study to help inform their action, either in the written or film version.

- **Inform and involve parents about what you are doing through written materials and through a meeting where the young people speak out about what they are learning.** Ask parents to help their children think through the issues.

- **Create a process for young people to forge solutions**. They can hold hearings, survey their group, do research to find out what other groups have done, and so forth. All of these experiences build important leadership skills.

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- **Jointly select some strategies to try out to reduce the amount of violence in the lives of young people, and specifically, ones that might tackle the issues of diversity and accepting difference.**

- **Determine what the criteria will be for knowing that the solutions are effective.** Monitor success and make corrections or changes as necessary.

5) Establish, invest in, and evaluate violence prevention efforts, as well as positive youth development efforts

There are a number of violence prevention programs throughout the country. In Appendix 4 we list several programs that have been evaluated, as well as other respected resources for schools and communities. We recommend that **government** at all levels and **schools** fund efforts to increase awareness of youth violence and to prevent it. Promising new efforts should also be evaluated so that we can determine if and how they are effective.

- **Invest in raising awareness** of the importance of emotional violence and discrimination. These should be seen as triggers for more serious violence.

- **Invest early in violence prevention efforts.** The call for beginning prevention efforts early came from children in our focus groups. They said that beginning efforts in middle school and high school is much too late. Good early investments can include parenting programs for prospective parents, such as home visiting programs, especially those that have been shown by research to reduce child abuse and children's delinquency.

- **Invest in continuing violence prevention programs throughout the early childhood years**. A number of young people reported that the transition to middle school can be particularly stressful for kids, especially in communities where there are large schools and children are grouped together from many different neighborhoods for the first time. The kids repeatedly said that this transition could be less disruptive if young people as early as the preschool years have already learned tools for getting along, respecting differences, and resolving conflict.

- **Use schools as a place for establishing violence prevention efforts.** We are particularly struck by the fact that children with better relationships with teachers engage in less violence. The importance of this finding suggests that schools are a good place to institute violence prevention efforts. Community programs or religious school settings would be good as well.

- **Provide training for educators in violence prevention**. Teacher education efforts should include pre-service training on violence prevention. Learning these skills should also be a part of in-service training. Special programs in schools and communities could also be effective in ensuring that educators take an active role in preventing violence as well as in helping children solve conflicts in constructive ways.

- **Invest in a range of good mental health services and behavioral interventions for young people**

who are involved in violence, either as victims or aggressors. Prevention is crucial, but so is helping those young people who are troubled or in trouble.

- **Invest in programs that provide constructive activities during out-of-school time**. This includes good child care/early childhood programs and after-school programs.

- **Invest in youth community centers and other positive youth development efforts.** Youth community centers, which have begun to appear in a number of communities, give youth a safe place to hang out where they can gain leadership skills and have fun with activities as music recording, video production, graphic and web publishing, break-dancing, and graffiti murals. These centers can also offer high school GED preparation, college preparation, computer skills, and community organizing. They provide a place where young people can express themselves, be treated with respect, and be heard (unfortunately a rare experience for too many young people). These centers can publish youth-created magazines and journals, both with original poetry, artwork, photos, and writings by youth.

We take the suggestions by young people of keeping them safe very seriously. This includes **not having access to guns** as well as promoting **safe schools and safe communities.**

We also concur with young people when they write about **cleaning up the culture**—reducing the violence, stereotyping, and disrespect in the media and in the culture in general.

We think that **preventing violence should be a community-wide initiative**. This can include instituting a positive youth development initiative, bringing in speakers, holding community forums, setting community-wide goals for reducing violence, working with law enforcement to have better community policing, and measuring the results of these initiatives.

APPENDIX 1: SELECTED FULL TABLES[18]

The following questions in Tables 33 and 34 are adapted from the National School Crime and Safety Survey (NSCSS), the Hamilton Fish Institute on School and Community Violence at the George Washington University.

Table 33: Overall frequency of young people victimized by violence in the past month

In the past month how many times has ANYONE done any of the following to YOU ***on purpose*** *– never, 1 – 4 times, 5 – 9 times, 10 times or more?*

	Never	1-4 *Times*	5-9 *Times*	10 or more *Times*
Teased or gossiped about in a mean way	33%	38%	15%	14%
Rejected or ignored	40%	40%	12%	9%
Bullied	68%	19%	7%	6%
Hit, shoved, kicked, or tripped	54%	28%	7%	11%
Pulled, twisted, squeezed, or pinched part of body	58%	27%	6%	9%
Attacked with a weapon	92%	6%	1%	1%
Forced to do sexual acts	92%	4%	1%	3%

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Table 34: Overall frequency of young people committing violence in the past month

In the past month how many times have YOU done any of the following to SOMEONE ELSE ***on purpose*** *– never, 1 – 4 times, 5 – 9 times, 10 times or more?*

	Never	1-4 Times	5-9 Times	10 or more Times
Teased or gossiped about in a mean way	44%	45%	7%	4%
Rejected or ignored	51%	39%	6%	4%
Bullied	71%	23%	3%	3%
Hit, shoved, kicked, or tripped	65%	25%	5%	5%
Pulled, twisted, squeezed, or pinched part of body	74%	18%	4%	4%
Attacked with a weapon	95%	3%	1%	1%
Forced to do sexual acts	96%	2%	0%	1%

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Table 35: Overall grades given to mothers

What grade would you give your mother on each of the following? Would you give her an A, B, C, D or F? A is Excellent, B is Good, C is Average, D is Below Average, and F is Failing.

	A	B	C	D	F
Listening to me without criticizing me or making fun of me in hurtful ways	60%	25%	9%	4%	3%
Being really focused on me when I need [them] to pay attention to me	45%	29%	15%	6%	4%
Knowing what is really going on in my life	38%	28%	16%	10%	8%
Keeping promises and being people I can trust	59%	20%	10%	6%	4%
Supporting my interests and getting involved in the things that interest me	54%	25%	11%	7%	4%
Helping me figure out how to deal with my own problems in ways that don't hurt others	61%	24%	9%	4%	3%
Giving me the help I need when I am in a tough spot	62%	21%	11%	5%	2%

Table 36: Overall grades given to fathers

What grade would you give your father on each of the following? Would you give him an A, B, C, D or F? A is Excellent, B is Good, C is Average, D is Below Average, and F is Failing.

	A	B	C	D	F
Listening to me without criticizing me or making fun of me in hurtful ways	46%	27%	13%	8%	6%
Being really focused on me when I need [them] to pay attention to me	44%	23%	19%	7%	7%
Knowing what is really going on in my life	28%	25%	21%	13%	14%
Keeping promises and being people I can trust	51%	24%	10%	7%	8%
Supporting my interests and getting involved in the things that interest me	49%	24%	13%	7%	7%
Helping me figure out how to deal with my own problems in ways that don't hurt others	43%	26%	17%	9%	6%
Giving me the help I need when I am in a tough spot	51%	24%	12%	6%	6%

Table 37: Overall grades given to teachers

What grade would you give your teachers on each of the following? Would you give them an A, B, C, D or F? A is Excellent, B is Good, C is Average, D is Below Average, and F is Failing.

	A	B	C	D	F
Listening to me without criticizing me or making fun of me in hurtful ways	48%	29%	13%	6%	5%
Being really focused on me when I need [them] to pay attention to me	35%	28%	22%	9%	6%
Knowing what is really going on in my life	14%	14%	22%	20%	30%
Keeping promises and being people I can trust	37%	21%	21%	10%	12%
Supporting my interests and getting involved in the things that interest me	23%	23%	25%	15%	14%
Helping me figure out how to deal with my own problems in ways that don't hurt others	41%	28%	19%	6%	6%
Giving me the help I need when I am in a tough spot	40%	25%	19%	8%	8%

Table 38: Overall grades given to friends

What grade would you give your friends on each of the following? Would you give them an A, B, C, D or F? A is Excellent, B is Good, C is Average, D is Below Average, and F is Failing.

	A	B	C	D	F
Listening to me without criticizing me or making fun of me in hurtful ways	38%	38%	14%	6%	4%
Being really focused on me when I need [them] to pay attention to me	35%	30%	23%	8%	4%
Knowing what is really going on in my life	39%	26%	18%	9%	9%
Keeping promises and being people I can trust	54%	25%	12%	5%	4%
Supporting my interests and getting involved in the things that interest me	42%	28%	17%	9%	4%
Helping me figure out how to deal with my own problems in ways that don't hurt others	38%	31%	18%	8%	5%
Giving me the help I need when I am in a tough spot	49%	28%	15%	6%	3%

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Table 39: Self-esteem and control over one's future

The questions for the items in Table 39 are adapted from "Manual for the Self-Perception Profile for Children," developed by Susan Harter of the University of Denver.

How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements - agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, *or* disagree strongly?

	Agree *Strongly*	Agree *Somewhat*	Disagree *Somewhat*	Disagree *Strongly*
I can reach my goals if I just work hard enough	72%	22%	4%	2%
I feel like it doesn't matter what I do—whatever happens will happen anyway	26%	26%	26%	21%
I feel like I am just as smart or smarter than people my age	35%	43%	15%	7%
I have an easy time making friends	44%	36%	13%	6%
I am pretty happy with the way I look	43%	38%	13%	7%
I am generally happy with myself as a person	51%	36%	9%	4%

Table 40: Triggers for fighting

How likely are you to physically fight someone when the following things happen?

	Very *Likely*	Somewhat *Likely*	Not Very *Likely*	Not At All *Likely*
Someone insults you in front of other people	11%	24%	33%	33%
Someone insults you when you are alone	10%	23%	30%	36%
Someone hits you	42%	24%	18%	17%
Someone insults one of your friends or family members	30%	31%	22%	17%

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Table 41: Racial/ethnic acceptance

How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about relationships among people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds – agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, *or* disagree strongly?

	Agree *Strongly*	Agree *Somewhat*	Disagree *Somewhat*	Disagree *Strongly*
It is OK to have a close friend from a different racial or ethnic background	86%	10%	2%	2%
It is OK to make jokes about or avoid people from different racial or ethnic backgrounds	6%	6%	19%	69%

Table 42: How adults at school handle fighting

How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements – agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, *or* disagree strongly?

	Agree *Strongly*	Agree *Somewhat*	Disagree *Somewhat*	Disagree *Strongly*
Adults at my school usually ignore fighting among kids	8%	19%	28%	45%
Adults at my school help to find ways to solve problems without fighting	48%	35%	11%	6%

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Table 43: Reports of overall frequency of violence according to school principals

How often do the following occur at your school?

	Never	About once Daily	About once a week	About once a month	About once every 3-4 months	About once or twice a year
Serious violent incidents	60%	0%	4%	5%	5%	26%
Less serious violent incidents	8%	5%	10%	14%	29%	34%
Incidents or threats of violence, or sexual, racial, or ethnic harassment	3%	25%	10%	20%	27%	16%

Table 44: Perceived family economic health

Which one of the following statements best describes your family situation?

% OF YOUNG PEOPLE SAYING YES TO THE FOLLOWING	Yes
My family has a hard time buying the things we need	9%
My family has just enough money for the things we need	27%
My family has no problem buying the things we need, and sometimes we can also buy special things	51%
My family has enough money to buy pretty much anything we want	13%

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APPENDIX 2: EXPERT INTERVIEWS

We interviewed the experts listed below to help us shape our study. We asked them: "If you were conducting a study that looks at the lives of children who handle conflict in a constructive way versus those who become engaged in violence, what would you want to investigate?" In addition to offering insight on the study design, many also were a tremendous help in reviewing both our survey drafts and the final report. These experts looked at the issue of children and violence from a number of different academic and applied perspectives. The experts include young leaders who were specifically chosen because of their previous first-hand experiences with violence, and/or their current work and effectiveness in nonprofit and grass-roots efforts that help today's youth deal with and prevent violence in their own lives.

Lawrence Aber, Ph.D., director, National Center for Children in Poverty at the Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University http://cpmsnet.columbia.edu/dept/nccp/

Barbara O'Brien, Ph.D., executive director of the Colorado Children's Campaign http://www.coloradokids.org/

Andrea Camp, senior fellow, Institute for Civil Society http://www.civilsocietyinstitute.org/

Pam Cantor, M.D., president, Children's Mental Health Alliance Foundation http://www.cmhalliance.org/index.asp/

Felton Earls, M.D., professor of human behavior, Harvard School of Public Health http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/

Peter Fonagy, M.D., director, Child and Family Center, The Menninger Clinic, and professor of clinical health psychology, University College London http://www.menninger.edu/

James Garbarino, Ph.D., professor of human development, Cornell University http://www.humec.cornell.edu/units/hd/

Marqueece Harris-Dawson, associate director, The Community Coalition http://www.ccsapt.org/index.html

Sarah Ingersoll, executive director, National Campaign Against Youth Violence http://www.noviolence.net/

Val Joseph, executive director, Inner Strength http://www.innerstrength.org/

Maria Guajardo Lucero, Ph.D., executive director, Assets for Colorado Youth http://www.buildassets.org/

Steven Marans, Ph.D., Harris Associate Professor of Child Psychoanalysis at Yale University; director, National Center for Children Exposed to Violence http://wwww.nccev.org

William Morales, director, Egleston Square Youth Center http://www.ymcaboston.org/egleston/index.shtml

Sanford Newman, J.D., president, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids http://www.fightcrime.org/

Joy D. Osofsky, Ph.D., professor of public health and psychiatry, Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center http://www.lsu.edu/index2.html

Alan Rambam, president, Shine http://www.shine.com/

Daniel Siegel, M.D., medical director of infant and preschool services at University of California, Los Angeles http://www.ucla.edu/

Laurence Steinberg, M.D., professor of psychology, Temple University http://www.temple.edu/psychology/Administration_links.html

Dennis L. White, The Hamilton Fish Institute on School and Community Violence at George Washington University http://www.hamfish.org/

Esperanza Zachman, program director, Tony Grampsas Youth Services Program in Colorado http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/ps/pp/tony/tonyhom.asp

APPENDIX 3: SELECTED RESOURCE BOOKS AND REPORTS FOR FAMILIES, TEACHERS, AND THE PUBLIC

Aitcheson, A. & Haas, H. (2000). Listen to our children! Read the words of the true experts: America's youth speak out about violence. Temecula, CA: A.H.C.C.

Benson, P. (1997). All kids are our kids: What communities must do to raise caring and responsible children and adolescents. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass publishers.

Cappello, D. (2000). Ten talks parents must have with their children about violence. New York, NY: Hyperion.

Galinsky, E. (2000). Ask the children: The breakthrough study that reveals how to succeed at work and parenting. New York, NY: Quill.

Garbarino, J. (1999). Lost boys: Why our sons turn violent and how we can save them. New York, NY: Anchor Books.

Garbarino, J. (2001). Parents under siege: Why you are the solution, not the problem, in your child's life. New York: The Free Press.

Gilligan, J. (1997). Violence: Reflections on a national epidemic. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Goodwillie, S. (ed.). (1993). Voices from the future: Children speak out about violence in America. Washington, DC: Children's Express.

Guajardo Lucero, M. (2000). The spirit of culture: Applying cultural competency to strength-based youth development. Denver, CO: Assets for Colorado Youth.

Gurian, M. (1999). The good son: Shaping the moral development of our boys and young men. New York, NY: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam.

Hersch, P. (1998). A tribe apart: A journey into the heart of American adolescence. New York: Ballantine Books.

Higgins, G.O. (1994). Resilient adults: Overcoming a cruel past. New York: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Kindlon, D. & Thompson, M. (1999). Raising Cain: Protecting the emotional life of boys. New York, NY: Ballantine Books.

Pipher, M.(1995). Reviving Ophelia: Saving the selves of adolescent girls. New York, NY: Ballantine Books.

Pollack, W. (1998). Real boys: Rescuing our sons from the myths of boyhood. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company.

Slaby, R.G., Roedell, W.C., Aresso, D. & Hendrix, K. (1995). Early violence prevention: Tools for teachers of young children. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Siegler, A.L. (1997). The essential guide to the new adolescence. New York, NY: Dutton.

Simmons, R. (2002). Odd girl out: The hidden culture of aggression in girls. New York, NY: Harcourt.

Steinberg, L. (1996). Beyond the classroom: Why school reform has failed and what parents need to do. New York, NY: A Touchstone Book.

Stern-LaRosa, C. & Bettmann, E. H. (2000). The Anti-Defamation League's hate hurts: How children learn and unlearn prejudice. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Stepp, L.S. (2000). Our last best shot: Guiding our children through early adolescence. New York, NY: Riverhead Books.

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APPENDIX 4: SELECTED RESEARCH AND PUBLIC POLICY REPORTS

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APPENDIX 6: SELECTED RESOURCES AND PROGRAMS THAT ADDRESS VIOLENCE, DIVERSITY, AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Programs that have been evaluated

Several violence prevention programs have been evaluated as effective. For further information on these evaluations, see Henrich, C.C., Brown, J.L. & Aber, J.L. (1999). "Evaluating the effective of school-based violence prevention: Developmental approaches." Social Policy Report, Society for Research in Child Development. Ann Arbor, MI: 12(3): 1-20.

These programs are:

Facing History and Ourselves (FHAO). This is a program for middle and high school students. Its aim is to prevent violence and promote intergroup understanding by examining moral questions raised by historical events in the twentieth century. It is based on the premise that the ability to differentiate and coordinate the perspectives of oneself and others is an important social-cognitive skill and is a precursor to negotiation, moral understanding, and action. http://www.facing.org

Providing Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS). This is a social and emotional learning curriculum designed for elementary school-aged children. It is predicated on the notion that children need to learn to recognize and understand emotions and to find effective ways to express them. There are approximately 50 lessons in three units: Self-Control, Emotions and Relationships, and Social Problem-Solving.
http://www.prevention.psu.edu/PATHS/WHATIS.HTM

Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP). This program is for children in the first through twelfth grades. This program assumes that children can learn alternative strategies to aggression. Its purposes are to make children aware of the different choices they have for managing conflict, help them develop skills for making these choices, encourage their respect for their own and others' cultures, teach them to identify and stand up against prejudice, and to make them aware of their part in creating a more peaceful world.
http://www.esrnational.org/about-rccp.html

Second Step. This Committee for Children program provides a school-based curriculum for students in preschool through junior high that teaches children the attitudes and behaviors that contribute to violence. Children that participate in this program learn to reduce impulsive and aggressive behavior and increase their social competence. http://www.committeeforchildren.org/violence.shtml

Other widely respected programs/resources include, but are not limited to:

American Jewish Committee/Hands Across the Campus. This youth-oriented training promotes tolerance and combats prejudice in secondary schools across the country. http://www.ajc-chicago.org/main.html

Anti-Defamation League (ADL). ADL has developed numerous guides and activities that are based around themes of anti-bias and anti-violence. http//:www.adl.org

Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (CSPV) is housed within the University of Colorado at Boulder; its threefold mission is to collect and disseminate resources on violence; offer assistance for the evaluation and development of violence prevention programs; and conduct research on violence. http://www.colorado.ed/cspv

Educators for Social Responsibility. Training, curriculum and lessons plans offer assistance to educators and students in order to discuss conflict, bullying, and discrimination, among other topics. http:// www.esrnational.org

National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ) offers training and research that combats bias, bigotry, and racism. NCCJ promotes understanding and respect through advocacy, conflict resolution, and education. http://www. www.nccj.org

National Institute of Justice's Safe Schools Initiative. The mission of the Safe Schools Initiative is to develop new, more effective school safety technologies. These technologies also assist the nation's schools in achieving the perception and reality of a safer learning environment for students, teachers, and staff through the development, transfer, testing, technical assistance, and evaluation of safety and security technologies. http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/

Partners Against Hate lists resources and organizations to help educators promote diversity, improve intergroup relations, and teach students about the harmful effects of bias and hate. They offer both their own original work as well as various other internet resources, links, and information. http://www.partnersagainsthate.org

Teaching Tolerance/Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). The Teaching Tolerance program of SPLC serves as a clearinghouse of information about anti-bias programs and activities being implemented in schools across the country, and also produces and distributes free, high-quality anti-bias materials. http://www.splcenter.org/teachingtolerance/tt-index.html

Workable Peace seeks to teach young people and educators to manage conflict between groups through their training, curriculum, and projects. http://www.workablepeace.org/

Resources that list available evaluated programs:

A National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ) offers Intergroup Relations in the United States: Programs and Organizations that reviews organizations. A description of the book can be found at http://www.nccj.org/nccj/nccj.nsf/articleall/4539?opendocument&1

Blueprints for Violence Prevention was developed by The Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the

University of Colorado at Denver. It highlights programs that have demonstrated some degree of effectiveness via a rigorous evaluation design. The website is http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/model/Default.htm

The Collaborative of the Advancement of Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) identifies effective violence prevention programs. The website is http://www.casel.org/.

The United States Department of Education provides a list of exemplary programs with demonstrated effectiveness. The website address is http://www.ed.gov/.

In addition, an online resource is a directory produced by Project Change and sponsored by Levi Strauss. This directory is currently being revised with more in-depth profiles of a smaller number of organizations, including A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE INSTITUTE ®, but it has not yet been completed. Their site address is http://www.projectchange.org.

Programs that reach out to youth, promote positive youth development and civic engagement include, but again are in no way limited to:

Assets for Colorado Youth provides leadership in creating positive social change for youth in communities throughout Colorado and nationally. http://www.buildassets.org

Center for Youth as Resources seeks to engage youth as partners with adults in bringing about positive community change. Their three principles are: youth-adult partnership in governance; youth as grantmakers; and youth-led service. Their website is http://www.yar.org.

Colorado School Mediation Project focuses on working with youth in school settings to implement strategies such as peer meditation and restorative justice. Other services include training, statewide/national conferences, and youth empowerment. Their website is http://www.csmp.org.

The Conflict Center offers informational resources, training and technical assistance in conflict mediation and resolution. http://www.conflictcenter.org

Do Something is an organization that helps young people gain vital leadership skills while becoming involved in their community in meaningful ways. Young people identify the issues that they care about and create community projects to turn these ideas into action. http://www.dosomething.org

National Service-Learning Partnership (NSLP) is the only national membership organization bringing together practitioners, administrators, policy-makers, researchers, community leaders, parents and young people to support K-12 service-learning. http://www.nylc.org

The Search Institute is a nonprofit organization that seeks to advance the well-being of adolescents and children by generating knowledge and promoting its application. The Institute also generates, synthesizes, and communicates new knowledge, convenes organizational and community leaders, and works with state and national organizations. http://www.search-institute.org

SHiNE (Seeking Harmony in Neighborhoods Everyday) is a nonprofit organization that empowers young people to promote respect for diversity and end youth violence. SHiNE's innovative programming uses art, music, technology and sports to inspire creative self-expression and action. For more information on SHiNE, visit http://www.shine.com.

What Kids Can Do is a nonprofit organization that documents the value of young people working with teachers and other adults on projects that combine learning with public purpose. Their core audience consists of educators and policy-makers, journalists, community members, and students. http://www.whatkidscando.org

Youth Service America (YSA) is a resource and alliance center that is committed to increasing the quantity and quality of opportunities for young Americans to serve locally, nationally, or globally. Their mission is to strengthen the effectiveness, sustainability, and scale of the youth service and service-learning fields. http://www.ysa.org

NOTES

1 To the best of our knowledge, there has been only one other nationally representative study that has probed young peoples' ideas on addressing conflict. In this telephone poll conducted by MTV in April 1999, young people were asked what the biggest problem in their school was; they were then asked what solutions would help fix that problem. A number of them did answer violence; however, they were not asked specifically about violence in the question and the question was geared directly toward school.

2 Several steps were taken by Harris Interactive to ensure a representative sample, both in Colorado and nationally. First, the sample was selected using a two-stage stratification process. Stratification variables include school type (public, private, and parochial), grade coverage, urbanicity (rural, suburban, or urban), and region. Within the basic strata, defined by these dimensions, stratification was carried out by state, grade enrollment, and zip code. After the stratification process, if a particular school could not participate, it was replaced by a school with similar demographic characteristics. Virtually all children in cooperating classrooms completed the questionnaires, which were sealed in envelopes and mailed back to Harris Interactive. Finally, the data were weighted to correct any biases in the sample, based on data from the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics.

3 For readers who would like the findings at a glance, we suggest that you read the key findings and the pull-quotes throughout the report.

4 The focus group and expert quotes come from experts and youth from around the country and in Colorado.

5 Young people were asked to report how often they had experienced a number of different kinds of violence. We then grouped these experiences into emotional, physical, and extreme violence. For this report, we grouped bullying with emotional violence—though it could also be considered physical violence. We did not ask additional information from young people that could have helped us classify the types of bullying they experienced.

6 For clarity, we have adopted a style to differentiate findings from the Colorado study and all of the focus groups we conducted around the country. The suggestions of young people for ending violence are placed in indented italicized quotes, while statements from young people in focus groups are placed within the text.

7 We have used the ^ sign to indicate when a Colorado result is significantly different than a national result. We only report differences between the Colorado and national sample at $p<.01$, which indicates that the differences or relationships would occur by chance only 1 time in 100.

8 We have reported relationships that are statistically significant at a minimum threshold of p<.05 level. This means that our reported findings represent real relationships that would occur by chance no more than 1 in 20 times. When this occurs, we have used the symbol * throughout the text. This means that all findings designated with a * are *at least* significant at the p<.05 level. Results that are found to be significant at the p<.01 level, which indicates that the differences or relationships would occur by chance only 1 time in 100, have been designated with ** throughout the text. When we discussed several analyses together that have varying levels of statistical significance, we use a * to indicate that findings are *at least* significant at p<.05; although in many case, some are also significant at the p<.01 level.

9 All analysis was conducted using the *never, 1-4 times,* and *5 times or more* scale unless otherwise indicated.

10 The relationship between race/ethnicity and the frequency of victimization/aggression was assessed using multi-variate regression techniques that controlled for perceived family economic health and used the following categories: white, non-Hispanic; black or African-American; Hispanic; and other race. Regressions were conducted on the *never, 1-4 times, 5-9 times, 10 times or more* scale.

11 Young people were asked about their mothers, or whom they consider their mother, and their fathers, or whom they consider their father. Our findings for mothers and fathers only include those young people who have a mother or father or someone that they consider filling these roles.

12 Note: In this question we ask young people to "grade" their parents' parenting skills. This is a research technique that we have found provides a balanced assessment of how young people FEEL they are being parented. When we have compared mothers' and fathers' self-assessments with those of children in another study, we found that mothers see themselves more positively than young people, especially teens, do but that fathers' and young people's assessments are more closely aligned.

13 When we talk about overall or average grades, we are referring to an overall G.P.A. scale that was created by assigning each letter a numeric value, summing, and then dividing the answers so that we could assess the overall grade that young people gave their mothers, fathers, teachers, and friends.

14 We did not ask children what their interests were, and thus, some of them might not be applicable or appropriate for the classroom setting.

15 This scale was constructed using the two self-efficacy measures listed in Table 31. The scale was calculated by assigning weights to the answers (i.e., 4 points for *strongly agreeing* and 3 points for *agreeing* with the statement "I can reach my goals if I just work hard enough" and reversing the scale for "I feel like it doesn't matter..." so that 4=*strongly disagree*), summing those weights, and then based on the numeric values, separating the scores into three categories: low, middle and high. In order for a respondent's answers to be included in the scale construction, they had to answer both questions.

16 The self-esteem scale was based on the four items listed in Table 32. Again, the responses were then weighted, summed, and separated into categories based on the numeric values. If a respondent did not answer the majority of the four questions, then their responses were excluded from the scale.

17 Multiple linear regression was used to test the associations between multiple relationship variables and each type of violent experience/behavior on the *never, 1-4 times,* 5-9 *times,* and *10 times or more* scale. The explanatory power of parental relations, friend relations, and teacher relations was examined in separate regressions.

18 Due to rounding, tables may not always add to 100 percent.

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ASK THE CHILDREN

YOUTH & VIOLENCE

COLORADO STUDENTS SPEAK OUT FOR A MORE CIVIL SOCIETY

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

PS 030627

By Ellen Galinsky
and Kimberlee Salmond

the ASK THE CHILDREN SERIES

THE COLORADO TRUST
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Families and Work Institute

School shootings, bullying and other acts of youth violence have been reported as an epidemic both in Colorado and across the country. Yet the debate, until now, overlooked and often excluded young people themselves. *Youth and Violence: Colorado Students Speak Out for a More Civil Society* is the first study to ask Colorado's young people what they think can be done to stop the violence that affects them at home, at school and in their community. The Colorado Trust and the Families and Work Institute joined together to produce this first-of-its-kind study. In addition, the National Conference of State Legislatures helped frame the study questions so that the findings are relevant to policy and action. A parallel study was conducted with a nationally representative group of young people around the country during the same time frame. These results and videos of the findings of both studies are also available.

OVERALL FINDINGS

We asked a sample of 1,012 young people in the fifth through twelfth grades in Colorado this question: **"If you could make <u>one</u> change that would help stop the violence that young people experience today, what would that change be?"** Their responses inform the following **three major findings**:

- Although public discussion about violence has focused on **extreme violence**—such as school shootings—as emblematic of a major societal problem, the largest proportion of young people report teasing that goes beyond being playful, cruel put-downs and rejections as being very real violence to them. They say this **emotional violence** hurts and triggers more extreme violence.

- While blame and remedies for youth violence have been focused on parents and/or the schools, many young people have a larger focus: **a seemingly inescapable culture that celebrates sameness**, the one right way to be "in." They feel they need to join in to protect themselves.

- **Relationships are important**. Young people with better relationships with mothers, fathers, teachers and friends are much less likely to experience violence, either as victims or as aggressors. Positive support from important people in kids' lives can be an important factor in preventing violence.

In addition, a significant proportion of students call for measures to keep them safe, such as gun control, better security and stricter punishments for offenders. Students are clearly speaking out for a more civil society. They are also saying they **need** and **want** appropriate help in combating these problems.

SELECTED FINDINGS

Young people were asked how often in the past month they had experienced some type of violence—either because someone had done it to them *on purpose* or they had inflicted violence on someone else *on purpose*.

Many young people experience emotional violence:

- Two-thirds of young people (67%) have been teased or gossiped about in a mean way *at least once* in the past month and 29 percent have had this experience *five times or more*. Over half (57%) of young people have teased or gossiped about someone else *at least once* and 12 percent have done so *five times or more* in the past month. There are no overall differences between boys and girls with regard to how often they experience this kind of meanness.

- 61 percent of young people have been rejected or ignored *at least once* and 21 percent have had this happen *five times or more*. 49 percent have rejected or ignored others *at least once* and 10 percent have done this *five times or more*. In addition, almost one-third (32%) have been bullied *at least once* and 13 percent have been bullied *five times or more* in the past month; 29 percent have bullied someone else *at least once* and 6 percent *five times or more*.

Almost half of young people experience physical violence:

- 46 percent of young people have been hit, shoved, kicked or tripped *at least once* and 18 percent have had this happen *five times or more* in the past month. Almost two in five (35%) have carried out this behavior *at least once*, and 10 percent have done so *five times or more* in the past month.

One in 12 young people experience extreme violence:

- 9 percent of young people have been attacked with a weapon *at least once* and 2 percent have had this experience *five times or more* over the past month; 5 percent have done this to others *at least once* and 2 percent *five times or more*. Eight percent of young people have been forced to do sexual acts *at least once* and 3 percent have had this experience *five times or more* in the past month. 4 percent have forced someone else to do sexual things *at least once* and 2 percent have done this *five times or more*.

Emotional and physical violence go together:

- Victims of emotional violence are more likely to be victims of physical violence. Similarly, aggressors of emotional violence are also more likely to be aggressors of physical violence. For example, 49 percent of young people who have rejected or ignored someone else *at least once* have also hit, shoved, kicked or tripped someone—compared with 22 percent of those who have not rejected or ignored others.

Young people who have been harmed are much more likely to harm others:

- There is a clear and strong connection between being hurt and hurting others. Those young people who have been victims are much more likely than non-victims to be aggressors. For example, 31 percent of those who have been attacked with a weapon *at least once* attack others—compared with only 2 percent who have not had this experience.

Clearly, there are connections between being harmed and harming. Violence seems to create a vicious cycle—it's hard to know where blame and responsibility begin and end.

Young people with supportive relationships with mothers, fathers, teachers and friends are much less likely to be either victims or aggressors:

- Specifically, our analyses show that features of supportive relationships that make a difference include: paying attention to, monitoring and communicating well with young people, encouraging their interests and helping them learn to solve problems constructively.

COLORADO FINDINGS COMPARED TO NATIONAL FINDINGS

In developing these studies, we wanted to know how and if Colorado children's experiences with violence differ from those of children around the country. It is good news that we find very few differences between the Colorado and national samples; this means that our findings very much capture the experiences of children around the country. However, a few differences do emerge. These differences lead us to *speculate* that, perhaps in response to the Columbine High School shootings, there is increased awareness and more safety precautions in place in Colorado schools. While this study cannot test such theories it will perhaps serve as the impetus for additional research around the noted differences. Our findings show that:

More young people in Colorado feel *very safe* at school

- More young people in Colorado feel *very safe* at school than young people do nationally (47% in Colorado versus 39% in the national sample). This finding is significant since young people in Colorado do not report being victims or aggressors of physical or extreme violence less frequently than young people nationally.

Principals in Colorado are more likely to report serious violent incidents

- 40 percent of Colorado principals report that serious violent incidents have occurred at their schools versus 29 percent of principals in the national sample; however, children here are not necessarily more likely to report experiencing serious violence than are young people around the country. This could indicate that increased awareness on the part of principals, rather than the amount of actual violence, is influencing these results.

Colorado youth report they are slightly more likely to bully, reject or ignore others

- 29 percent of Colorado kids say they have bullied someone else *at least once* compared to 23 percent of youth nationally. Young people in Colorado are also more likely to have been rejected and ignored (61% versus 54%) and to reject and ignore others (49% versus 43%). However, these are the **only** differences we find in regard to frequency of victimization and aggression of any form of violence between the Colorado and national samples. Again, we can speculate that as a result of Columbine, awareness of what constitutes bullying has increased in the state, so that youth are more likely to report this than are youth in the national sample.

SPECIFIC IMPLICATIONS

As authors of this study, we recommend the following implications be considered.

For <u>PARENTS:</u>

- Help children see the commonalities in people that go beyond how we look, where we live and what we wear. Be a role model by treating others with respect and being respectful of differences, so that children grow up knowing that it is unacceptable to make fun of or exclude others, and are instead encouraged to appreciate, and in fact celebrate, diversity.

- Discipline young people in ways that will help them learn coping skills. Discipline also involves handling your own angry feelings in constructive ways.
- Make every effort to not only know what is going on with your kids, but to be engaged and involved in their lives. Find out what captures their interests and build on it—whether these interests are science, performing in a rock band, baseball, skateboarding or volunteering.

For TEACHERS:

- Make an effort to get to know each of the young people in your classroom as individuals.
- Set aside time on a regular basis to give young people experiences that truly engage them. In addition to classroom activities, engagement can take place through service-learning projects or youth leadership programs.
- Set good examples of civility and respect in your classroom and discipline young people in ways that will help them learn coping skills.

For SCHOOLS:

- Promote civility in the school and a respect for differences.
- Work toward reforms that let children feel known and understood in school, such as smaller schools and classrooms, "schools within schools," better teacher-student ratios, more counselors and mentor programs.
- Provide training for educators in violence prevention and begin violence prevention efforts in the early childhood years and continue them for children of all ages.

For COMMUNITIES:

- Offer good-quality support groups and parenting programs for parents with children of all ages—beginning in the pre-natal period and continuing into the pre-teen and teen years—that help families develop and maintain effective parenting skills.
- Create positive community-wide youth development initiatives. Establish and invest in youth centers where young people can gain leadership skills, express themselves in a variety of ways and are listened to.

For GOVERNMENT AT ALL LEVELS:

- Invest in raising awareness of the importance of emotional violence and discrimination as potential triggers for more serious violence. Provide a range of good mental health services for young people who are involved in violence, either as victims or aggressors.
- Invest in effective violence prevention efforts for children of all ages; ensure that promising practices are evaluated.
- Invest in programs that provide constructive activities during out-of-school time for children of all ages, including youth community centers and other positive youth leadership development efforts.

AND IMPORTANTLY, for EVERYONE:

- **Listen to children—and include them in the process of stopping violence.** Ask them what they think. Do something with what they tell you. Create processes where kids can find their own solutions to solve problems and work on implementing them. As one young person said, "If we are PART OF THE PROBLEM, then we need to be PART OF THE SOLUTION."

RESOURCES/SHARE AND LEARN ABOUT WHAT WORKS

For a selected listing of resources and programs that address violence, diversity and civic engagement, please see the full report, *Youth and Violence: Colorado Students Speak Out for a More Civil Society,* available via The Colorado Trust's website, www.coloradotrust.org.

If you are or have been part of an effort involving young people in stopping or reducing violence, please share it with others by submitting a brief description of what you have done to www.askthechildren.org. Check out what others have done or post questions that others can answer.

To order a full copy of *Youth and Violence: Colorado Students Speak Out for a More Civil Society,* **please contact The Colorado Trust at 303-837-1200 or go to www.coloradotrust.org or www.familiesandwork.org.**

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